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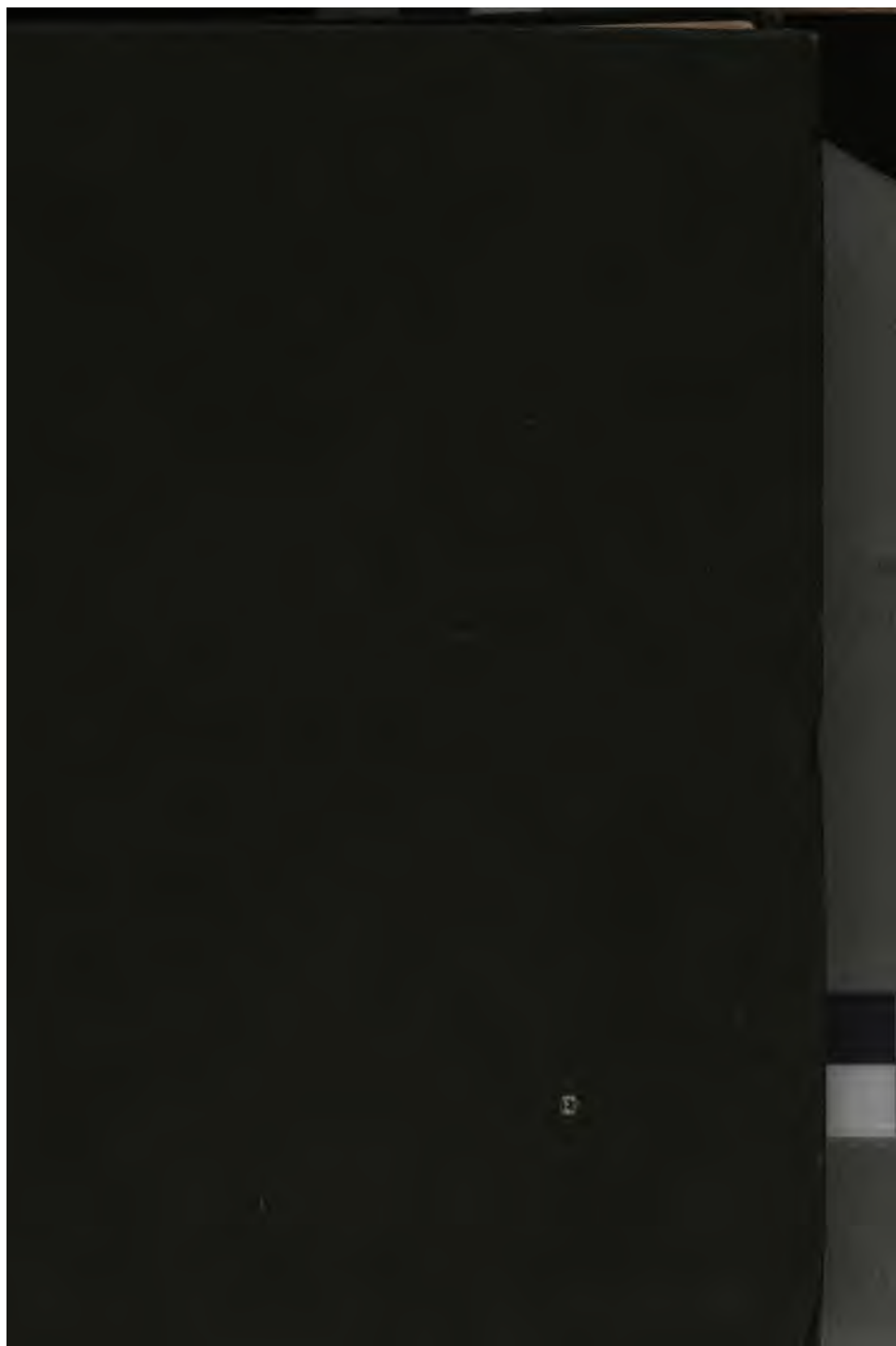
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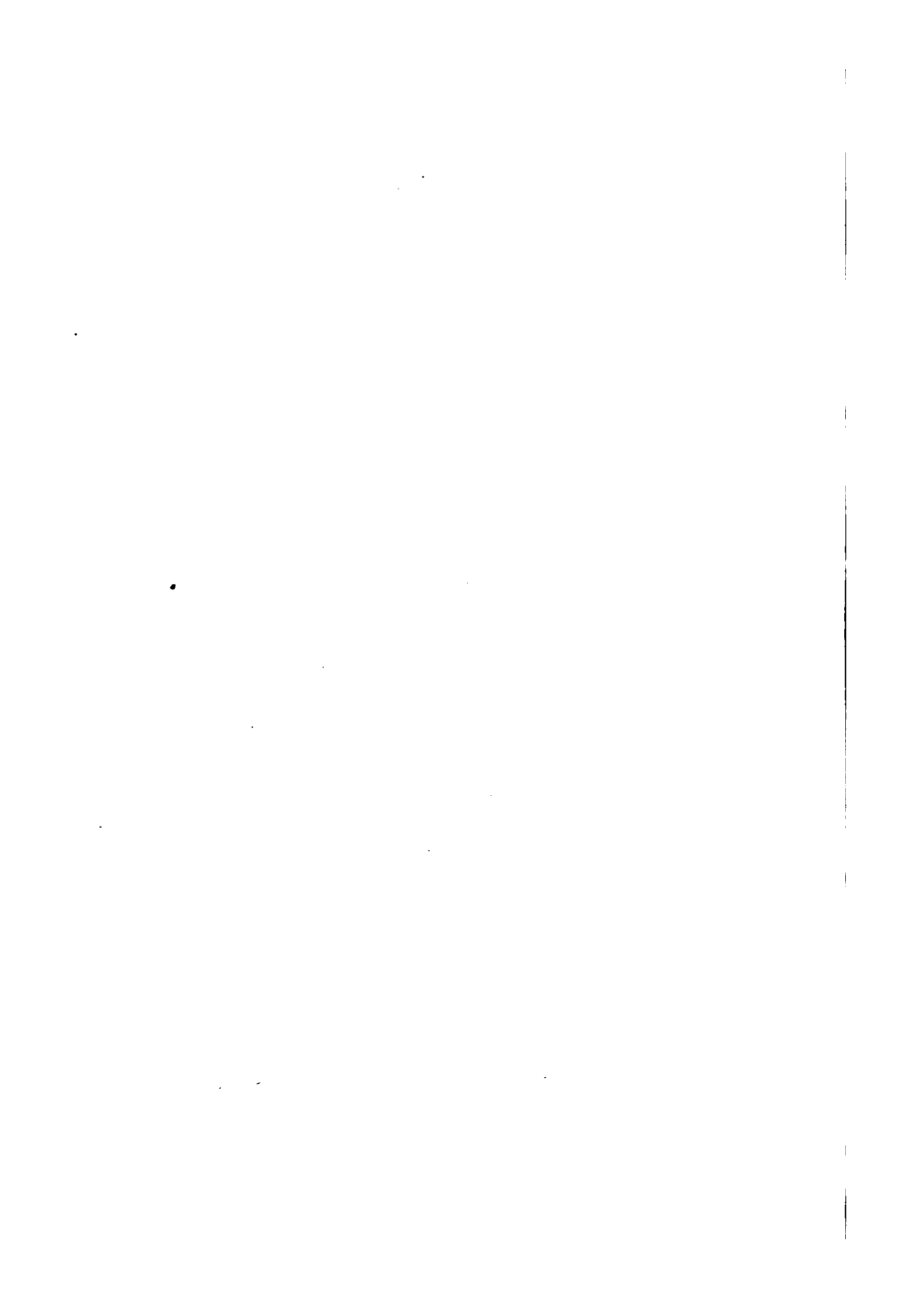


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Greywell Hill

1904

INDISCRETIONS



INDISCRETIONS

BY

COSMO HAMILTON

AUTHOR OF

"WHICH IS ABSURD," "THE GLAMOUR OF THE IMPOSSIBLE,"

"THROUGH A KEYHOLE," "IMPERTINENT DIALOGUES,"

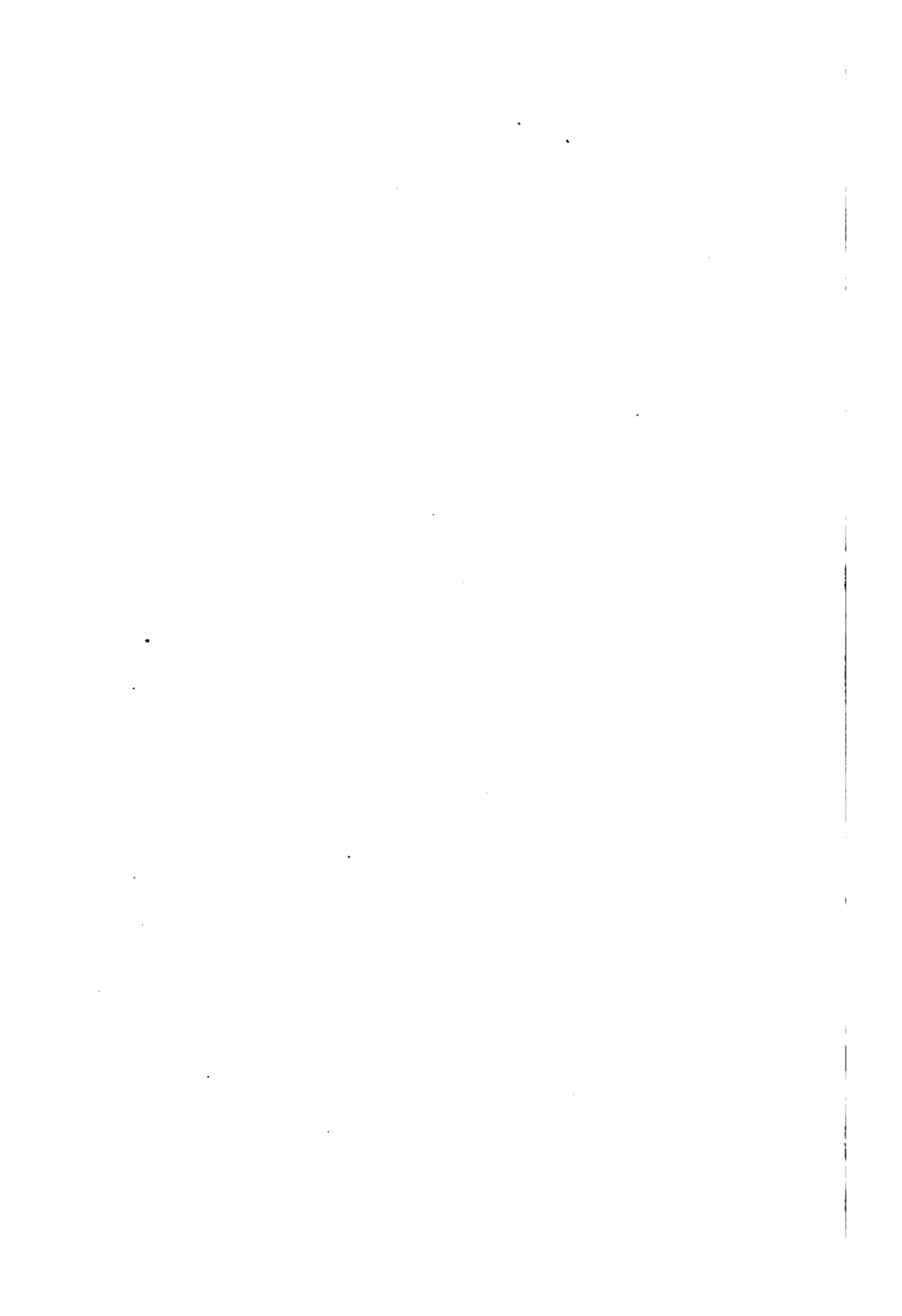
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INDISCRETIONS

A DERBY DIALOGUE

SCENE—*Epsom Downs. On the drag of the Marchioness of Brompton (née Patience P. Van Bloomer, of U.S.A.) are seated Reggie Hurlinum, the popular professional whip, who "landed 'em" safely on the course; Captain Arthur Tufton; Major Quirk—the D.S.O. man, not "Poodle" Quirk of the I.D.G.'s; Mrs Flynn, who wrote the deservedly famous Peeps, Piquant and Pointed, "very beautiful in her favourite colour, blue"; and Pamela Chelsea, who looks more unmistakably pure-bred and home-grown, and consequently more dainty and fragrant than ever. Everybody is waiting for the big race in the usually anxious and, in some cases, hysterical way.*

MAJOR QUIRK (*tapping the Marchioness on her real Transatlantic hand, which throbs in a glove three sizes too*

small). So far, dear lady, a rotten day, a fair average jolly rotten day, hey?

LADY BROMPTON (*her face—which for breadth, smoothness, and amplitude of feature out-Dana Gibson's Dana Gibson—falling heavily*). Oh, say! And I thought a nice blow-out of Epsom oxygen would clear away the cobwebs which clog your thinkin'-cage! Say, I'm real sorry. I am so.

MAJOR QUIRK (*laughing—and his laugh is like the sound of a nutmeg-grater heard through a half-closed door*). My dear lady, I ain't talkin' about oxi-what's-it's-name and blow-outs, and all that. So far as that goes, never enjoyed myself more in my life. You've done us proud. You have, dear lady—honest, straight, and square. No! when I talked about a rotten day, I meant in regard to luck, don't y' know—that funny bally thing I've been chasin' all my life, and never got within an acre of. It may seem incredible, considerin' everythin' has been given to me in each case by the stable as a positive cert., but all the animals I've been on to-day have gone down!

LADY BROMPTON (*a look of genuine concern spreading, necessarily slowly, over her face*). No! Well, say, ef that don't fairly wop creation. What, every one?

MAJOR QUIRK (*digging his gun-metal pencil into the tip of his chin*). Every mother's son.

A DERBY DIALOGUE

II

LADY BROMPTON (*with the perky air of a Member of Parliament who thinks he is putting his finger on the weak spots in a Bill of which he knows nothing*). Say, but that oughtn't to be allowed.

MAJOR QUIRK. That's precisely my argument. Some-
thin' jolly dicky somewhere, y' know, hey?

LADY BROMPTON (*warming to her subject the less she understands of it, even more in the manner of an M.P.*). Goin' down wholesale like that, it's disgraceful. Think how the pore things must hurt themselves. Say, wouldn't it be a good idea if they swept all the orange peel off the course before the dear horses run along it?

MAJOR QUIRK. My *dear* lady, what I mean to say—I keep forgetting you know nothin' about racin'—is that I've been and tumbled on to all the "stumers"; that, in plain English, every gee I've put my goblets on has more or less gone and died at the start.

LADY BROMPTON. *No!* Oh, say, Major, how just too horrible shockin' for any parlour words! I suppose it was nerves. Are they buried yet?

MAJOR QUIRK. My *dear* lady, don't you— But of course you don't. How should you? Let me explain fully and carefully in pure Parliamentary English. What I mean to say—and I'm pretty plain as a general rule, so they tell me at the club, he! he!—is that the horses I

backed to win, or, in other words, put a bit on to pull it off, don't y' know, got away all right and then dashed well allowed themselves to be smashed to pulp, knocked out of time completely, and absolutely put out of existence half-way up the course.

LADY BROMPTON (*more at sea than before, but full of pluck*). I see. I quite take you now. But, say, what real cowards the jockeys must be to allow their animals to be treated like that. I suppose, when they see these wild smashers coming along, they jest get off and mizzle. But, say, what a real terr-ble mess the grass must be in, anyhow! All hoofs and tails. Do you think, Major, you could influence me one of the dead animals' shoes as a memento?

THE MAJOR (*giving her up and uttering another excellent imitation of a nutmeg-grater*). He! he! If you're not a reg'lar good 'un, dear lady; dash me if I jolly well know where to place one, and that's all about it. But (*with a groan*) if I don't find the winner of the Derby there'll be no marmalade on *my* toast for a time. Don't mention it about, Lady Brompton, but I've put my shirt on Volodyovski.

LADY BROMPTON (*with a slight addition to her colour and glancing involuntarily behind the Major's tie*). You may rely on me to be as mum as mutton. But say, Major, how in this world do you manage,

without a shirt, to keep your collar in the right place?
Whisper.

[*The Major, with another loud imitation, whispers.
Evidently the explanation is satisfactory, for Lady
Brompton looks extremely relieved.*]

REGGIE HURLINUM (*who has been quietly examining
Mrs Flynn for some time—laughing suddenly*). Oh, ho,
ho, ho! he! he!

MRS FLYNN. Very musical and catching. But why,
please? May one know?

REGGIE (*between the gusts*). You—you don't look a
bit like it, either, he! he! By gad, you don't.

MRS FLYNN (*intensely interested—she has never met
Reggie before*). Like what? Please gather yourself
together and tell me. I'm so keen.

REGGIE (*struggling to do so and failing*). I don't know
how you dared, blow me if I do. He! he! The—the
first ones were so—so rippin', and so jolly true, and so
funny.

MRS FLYNN (*watching him a little uneasily*). The first
what, please?

REGGIE. But then to—to actually bring out a parody
on 'em, as a kind of answer, written by yourself. . . .
That beats everything, by Jove it does. The mother—

he! he! Why, blest if she ain't got a quicker eye for quiet detail than What'shername—the whelp, don't you know. Rather useful for your sister, too, the puff about her shop, eh?

MRS FLYNN (*suddenly seeing and breaking into a delightfully relieved laugh*). Oh—oh, I understand. That! Oh, yes, yes. Of course. You read 'em, did you? Shall I tell you—?

[*She whispers to Reggie, whose good-natured, brickdust face alters its expressions as quickly as reputations are ruined.*]

ARTHUR TUFTON (*who is determined to propose to Pamela Chelsea before the return journey or die—thinking it about time to make a start*). Er—I—I hate this meeting, don't you?

PAMELA (*looking at him briefly for two reasons—the first because she is surprised, and the second, because she wants to admire his straight nose*). Do you? I simply love it. The enormous crowd, swaying and shouting, and dressed in such quaint clothes, making as much noise as possible, the popping of champagne bottles, the cries of the hawkers, the tum-tum of the banjo, the wheezing of the concertina—oh, how I adore it all! I'm certain that if I'd been a man I should have been

a bookmaker—"Chelsea, of the good old firm," don't you know.

ARTHUR TUFTON (*wondering how on earth to unload the burden of his love*). Er—are you keen about watching the next race? Wouldn't you rather talk?

PAMELA. Keen isn't the word! Of course we can talk at the same time. You see, I've got my whole year's dress allowance on Wargrave, and if he doesn't win I shall be in the deplorable predicament of having to manage on the things I've got or stay in bed.

ARTHUR TUFTON. But why Wargrave? Have you got information?

PAMELA. None whatever. But I had to back it because, years ago, when I was quite young, I had a cat, named War, who died and was buried in a grave. There you are, don't you know. Ought to romp home. . . . Oh, there they go, the darlings. Just *hark* at the crowd!

[*The horses go by in a preliminary canter. The Marchioness is pushed up on the box-seat by Quirk and Hurlin. Mrs Flynn stands on the cushions beside her, upon Reggie's best overcoat, doubled up, and Arthur Tufton helps Pamela on to one of the seats. Above the crowd's rumble, which resembles*

heavy seas breaking upon shingle, can be heard the incessant hoarse cries of members of "Good old firms!" "Ten-ter-one bar four!" "Ten-ter-one the field!" "Two-ter-one Vollywhisky!" "Fifteen-ter-two Allyscutum!" "'Undred-ter-eight Song Macloo!" "'Undred-ter-six Dolly-cles!"

PAMELA (*holding her glasses with one hand and leaning with the other on Tufton's shoulder*). They're off at last! . . . Will you let me lean on your shoulder? . . . I'm trembling so.

TUFTON (*with a great effort*). I wish you'd always jolly well make use of my shoulder.

PAMELA (*breathlessly*). You're very kind. . . . Oh, I *do* hope I win. . . . It'll be awful to have no clothes to go about in.

TUFTON (*his voice shaking*). I only hope I win too. If I don't life for me will be a blank.

PAMELA. How they're tearing along! . . . Do you stand to win much?

TUFTON (*intensely*). Everything I love in the world.

PAMELA. Good gracious! What's the name of your horse?

TUFTON (*in a gasp*). Pamela.

PAMELA (*her glasses shaking suddenly; the blood flood-*

ing her face and neck). Oh ! . . . What a—a funny coincidence, Captain Tufton !

TUFTON (*growing more and more ill at ease*). Do you understand ? I'm blackguard enough to love you past all words, scoundrel enough to wish to be with you till I die, to think about and see and talk to nobody in the world but just you. Pamela, will you forgive me for my beastly cheek and marry me ?

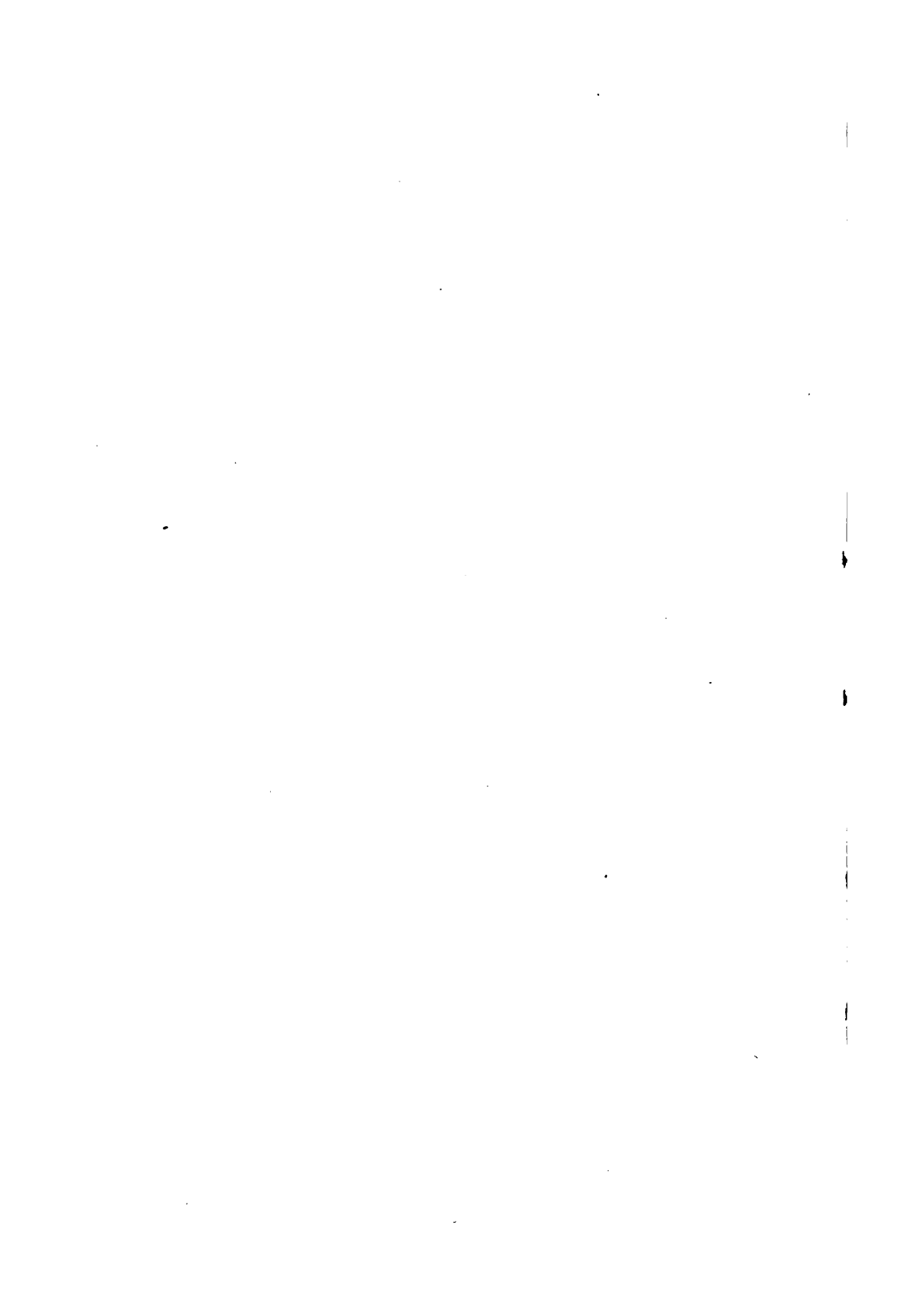
PAMELA. Y-yes.

TUFTON (*at the top of his voice*). Yes, did you say ?

PAMELA (*trying to wipe away the mist on her glasses*). I believe I may have done so ; but why, why did you ask me at such a moment as this ? When the horses went by I couldn't see them, and I don't know whether I've won or not.

TUFTON (*clutching her hand tight*). But I know that I've won, little woman. And it doesn't matter in the least about Wargrave now, because I will see that you have frocks to wear for the rest of your life.

PAMELA. Oh, so you will, Arthur. Well, certainly that *is* a relief, isn't it, darling ?



"DEAR" ASCOT

SCENE—*The Enclosure on the first day, and as the sporting prophets, who are bound to have their mild jokes, you know, are in the habit of saying, "all the world and somebody else's wife rub shoulders in this famous and expensive spot." For ourselves, however, we are not, at the moment, concerned with all the world and the wives in question. Our attention is wholly directed towards the Marchioness of Bloomsbury—well remembered by the older generation as "Lardy-Dardy" Dolly Dimple, who startled the lethargic England of '50 into red-hot enthusiasm by her inimitable rendering of that famous song called "Don't yer wish yer, wish yer, wish yer, wish yer, wish yer, wish yer was"—towards the Marquis who married her, and towards the Earl of St Pancras, who is, as the "Peerages" have it, their issue.*

ST PANCRAS (*arriving, and turning suddenly on his mother with petulant pedanticism*). Mother! Really!

THE MARCHIONESS (*looking up briefly from her betting-book*). Well, dearie boy, what's the row? (*To the Marquis, who is looking over her shoulder*) D'y'see, pa, dear? I've got a tenner on the Raft to win, a tenner on Stealaway to win, a tenner on Solicitor to win, fifty on Simon Glover; one, two, three—an absolute cert., I should say—

ST PANCRAS (*tapping the betting-book with the ferule of his careful stick*). Mother, did you hear me speak to you?

THE MARCHIONESS (*fondly*). Yes, my pet, that I did; and I asked you what was the row.

THE MARQUIS (*with good-natured impatience*). Oh, get away, Pan, there's a good feller. Can't yer see yer mother and I are up to our eyes in business? . . . Yes, my love. Well? Fifty on Simon Glover; one, two—

ST PANCRAS (*the blood settling at the tip of his very Norman nose*). Father, I *shall* speak. What I have to say to my mother must be said at once. Surely, surely, she can put down that degrading betting-book for one moment.

THE MARQUIS (*shrugging his broad, insular shoulders*). Go it, Doll, old lady. Speak to the boy and get it over. He'll only go on bullying us both like this till you do.

THE MARCHIONESS (*closing the book on her thumb and beaming affectionately at St Pancras*). Well, Panny, darlin', throw it off your chest, dearie. There's a lot to do, you know. Your pa and I have got to make money somehow to pay our expenses at this dear place, and there's no time to lose. Nothin' to complain about, is there? I'm behavin' myself all right, ain't I?

ST PANCRAS (*trembling with injured dignity*). Mother, how can I say it? I—I notice with horror that you, a Fitzbattleaxe by marriage, are dressed in a frock which would look young on a girl of eighteen.

THE MARQUIS (*giving a huge guffaw*). Haw! haw!

ST PANCRAS. Please, father! . . . And, mother, as though *that* were not enough, your hat is quite the most bewitching and frivolous thing in the Enclosure.

THE MARQUIS. Haw! haw!

ST PANCRAS. Your waist is almost imperceptible, your complexion is a positive masterpiece, and it is difficult even for me, who know how white you are in reality, to tell that your bronze head is dyed.

THE MARQUIS. Think of that, Doll! There's a feather in your cap, by gad!

ST PANCRAS (*his voice trembling more than ever*). Father, it is not a feather. My mother well knows my views on the matter of her dress. She tells me I am

hideously behind the times. That, to the detriment of my peace of mind, is indeed the truth. I can't forget that I am a Fitzbattleaxe. I ask you, f-father, would my great-grandmother, or even my grandmother, have appeared in public at Royal Ascot, at the ripe and beautiful age of sixty-three, looking like an unmarried girl of eighteen?

THE MARQUIS (*his clean-shaven, florid, sporting face twitching with laughter*). By gad, wouldn't she just, if only she'd known how! . . . But, my very dear good Pan, why on earth *can't* you forget the days of Queen Elizabeth?

ST PANCRAS (*trembling, pale, and intensely moved*). Father, I can't. It's no use, I can't. I am a Fitzbattleaxe, and when I think that a Fitzbattleaxe daily assisted William the Conqueror in his toilet; when I remember that we caught Rufus in our arms in the New Forest; that we signed our name third after the King's at Magna Charta—

THE MARQUIS. He! he! Did we? Oh, good Lor', what a memory the feller's got!

ST PANCRAS. I say, father, when I recollect that we, the Fitzbattleaxes, are the sole representatives of an illustrious historical line of ancestors who devoted their lives to such useful and honourable pursuits as I have mentioned, it wounds me to the quick, it shakes me to

my very foundations, to think what they would say could they but see us at this moment. My mother, who really had no right to be my mother—

THE MARQUIS (*angrily*). That'll do, St Pancras. Keep off that grass, please.

ST PANCRAS. I—I love my m-mother, f-father; but the fact remains that she is the first actual blot upon our otherwise spotless escutcheon . . .

THE MARQUIS (*puffing*). Dem the 'scutcheon! (*Tenderly*) Dear old Doll!

THE MARCHIONESS (*sobbing, dry, hard sobs—useful sobs when complexions are ready for the day*). Thanks, old man.

ST PANCRAS. My mother, I say, not leaning upon a chaste crutch stick, gently walking in rustling silks, bowing to her inferiors slightly, but kindly, her beautiful silver head; but p-painted and t-tightened and eager to make money, a slave to the despicable and degrading habits of betting and dyeing her hair! And you, my father, a Fitzbattleaxe—

THE MARQUIS (*mostly amused, but a little bit annoyed*). Oh, rot! Fitzbattleaxe fitz fiddlestick. My dear Doll, send him away, and let's get on with the day's work. We *must* pull off a winner, if we back every horse in the race. What have we done to deserve a freak like this?

THE MARCHIONESS (*taking the boy's arm affectionately*).

He's a dear, and you know it. He's only a little behind the times, that's all. Honest Injun, dearie, much as I love your pa, I wouldn't have married him if I'd thought it would have upset you so. But look around you, don't tremble so, my boy, my bonnie bairn, *I'm* not the only music-hall star who has married into the uppermost ten, by a long chalk. But nobody minds nowadays, you know, dearie. On the contrary, it's a rare smart thing to do. And they all paint their faces and pull in at the waist, and try and look eighteen at sixty-five—ay, and at seventy-five too; they do indeed. Why shouldn't they? We don't have to comb Kings' hair, or catch them in the New Forest, or sign promissory notes for them nowadays, you know. This is a cheap age, dearie, when everybody's got to use his brains to make both ends meet, this is; and there is no difference to-day between a marchioness and a laundress, or a duke and a dusthole-man. You're too sensitive, dearie. You ought to be dressed up in those tin things we've got at the Castle, with the red cross on the chest, and then you wouldn't feel it so. Do'ee stop trembling, my bonnie boy, do'ee now, and you shall have a nice plump hundred to play with if Simon Glover pulls it off. There!

ST PANCRAS (*pulling himself together*). M-mother, I—
I see your point, of course, and I shall accept your

hundred; but if I live to forty—which I don't think I shall—I can never get accustomed to think that I, a Fitzbattleaxe, am not above, beyond, out of reach of the upstarts, the new rich, I see around me in this Enclosure. B-but, I—I'll try and bear up. After all, I *am* a Fitzbattleaxe, am I not?

THE MARQUIS. You are, my boy, you are. There is no absolute doubt about it. . . . Run away, run away, and let your mother and father earn their living by the sweat of their brow. . . . Simon Glover fifty—yes, my dear?

THE MARCHIONESS (*kissing the boy, and opening the betting-book*). And a tenner on all the other entries for the Hunt Cup. And if we don't pull off *something* and make a bit, Sally old man, then I'll never put another bob upon a gee. Ah! (*looking round with a smile full of reminiscence*) but what a dear place it is!

THE MARQUIS (*totting up her bets*). You're right, Doll, old girl, it is, devilish dear. By gad! they're off. This way, old lady!

LORD'S, AND LITTLE LADIES

SCENE—*The famous and essentially unpicturesque cricket ground at St John's Wood—a wood equally famous and, if possible, more unpicturesque ; where it is quite impossible to see the trees for the houses—houses patronised by the actor with a penchant for the cultivation of the giddy nasturtium, the actress who hasn't the very least objection to the threepenny 'bus, the literary "gent." who flings off a "feuilleton" with the ease and elegance with which a well-bred duck flings off water from its waterproof back, and other mysterious and much-photographed people, whose heads and shoulders repose with triumphant satisfaction in tuppenny packets of poisonous cigarettes.*

That yearly institution for the encouragement of friendly rivalry among fond parents—the Eton and Harrow match—is in progress. Consequently there is the usual collection of delightfully overdressed West-end tradespeople upon hired coaches, looking down with affability almost beatific upon their customers—re-

presentatives of the Peerage, the Bench, the Bar, the Church, the Army, the Navy, and directors of public companies who have, in their time, wandered in and out of most of the just-mentioned professions.

MISS AUGUSTA VICTORIA ROSSLYN ROUT (*rising fifteen—calling from the top of her father's coach to Lady Mary Craymonde, rising fourteen, who is hurrying by with her governess with a look of strained anxiety upon her delicately-cut little face*). I say—little girl!

LADY MARY (*looking up, intensely surprised*). Are you addressing me, by any chance?

MISS ROUT (*with the kind of smile which has been in Old Bond Street since 1760, patronised by Royalty; "Ici on parle Français;" beware of imitations; trade-mark, "Nullus secundus"*). Yes, dear. I hate enjoyin' all he benefits of unlimited wealth on my own; and you and your mother don't look as though you were in the movement, so I should like you to come up on the coach, just for a treat.

THE GOVERNESS (*clasping her elbows to her prim sides with much Girton indignation*). What impudence! Common little thing!

LADY MARY (*suppressing a big smile*). Oh, dear

Miss Spike, do let's. It 'ud be a fearful joke, and we should see the game so *aw'-fly* well.

MISS ROUT (*with much condescension*). Of course! I know it's a great rise in life for you—you and your mother. But don't be nervous. I'll keep well in your depth.

THE GOVERNESS (*sotto voce*). Rise in life! Depth!
... Horrid little thing!

LADY MARY (*to Miss Rout, with wonderfully well-simulated gratitude*). Thank you so much! My—we should be delighted to accept your kind offer. Er—how do you get up? Oh, I see. (*She climbs gracefully up.*) By Jove! What an absolutely ripping view!

THE GOVERNESS (*a little breathless, taking a seat*). Dear me! What would your mother say if she could see us now—on this thing?

LADY MARY (*to the Governess*). She'd say, "That's right, Mary, my love. See life. Rub shoulders with your inferiors if you want to be really amused." (*To Miss Rout.*) Who won the toss?

MISS ROUT (*with a vastly superior air*). My dear little girl, this is not Scotch sports. This is cricket.

LADY MARY (*not daring to catch Miss Spike's Girtton eye*). I mean, which side is in? Oh, I see. Harrow is. I can spot Billy in the field. Dear old Billy (*with a great heaving sigh*). *Floreat Etona!*

MISS ROUT. Who's Billy, then?

LADY MARY. My brother, of course. Finest square leg of his day, master of the most tricky break from the off you ever saw, and good for his fifty any day of the week, bar Sundays, without giving a chance. Oh, Billy's a sort, if you like, is Billy. But I captured his middle stump once, all the same, by Jove I did, in a match he and I played alone on the tennis court in the square where we live. But as it wasn't first-class cricket, of course it made no difference to his average. Look at his walk, as he stumps across for the over. Cricketers are born, not made, and although I'm not quite sure what he meant, I jolly well agree with Uncle Piggy when he said that he believed Bill came into the world shouting "How's that, Umpire?"

MISS ROUT (*looking Lady Mary all over with an auctioneering eye*). Is your brother at Eton, then?

LADY MARY. Rather!

MISS ROUT. That's why father sent my brother to 'Arrow. "I should have liked to send my boy to Heton," he said, "but," he said, "it *is* so mixed," he said.

LADY MARY (*watching the game keenly*). Oh, well fielded, sir! Played in-deed. . . . So your brother's one of the enemy, is he?

MISS ROUT. If you mean that he is one of the 'Arrow young gentlemen, yes, he is.

LADY MARY (*looking at Miss Rout's shiny face out of the corner of her eye*). Oh, well, at least he's a keen cricketer, or he wouldn't be in the eleven, and that makes up for a good deal. Oh, well hit, Harrow! A tip-top boundary, by Jove! Played in-deed! I suppose, with a brother at Harrow, you hate Eton as much as I, with a brother at Eton, hate and loathe Harrow?

MISS ROUT. I've never thought about it one way or the other. I've heard father say that it costs just as much at both colleges.

LADY MARY (*hastily*). S-s-s-h! You mustn't say "college." "School" is the word.

MISS ROUT. Yes, but "college" is more select and genteel. Of course, you don't know about that. How should you? What with pocket-money and the Christmas-box to the headmaster, and one thing and another, it costs my father the best part of—

LADY MARY (*with a yell of delight*). Clean bowled! Oh, lovely! *Floreat Etona!*

MISS ROUT. And then, again, I like 'Arrow better than Heton, because they haven't got a trade-mark; or, anyway, you don't hear so much about it.

LADY MARY (*with a gasp*). Trade-mark?

MISS ROUT. Yes, that bit of Latin you keep on calling out. I know it's a trade-mark, because it reminds me of *Nullus secundus*, which you'll find stamped on every article we send out. . . . I suppose your father finds the bills a bit of a pull, don't he?

LADY MARY (*intent on the game*). Oh, yes, yes. . . . Oh, beautiful! Fielding like a bevy of angels, aren't they?

MISS ROUT. Then I wonder he flew so high with his boy. Very silly, because, as father very often says, "You get just as good an education at the Board School any day of the week." Father is a Grand Master now, you know.

LADY MARY (*absently*). Master carpenter?

MISS ROUT. Oh, Lor', no. What *are* you gettin' at? A Mason.

LADY MARY (*compelled into admiration*). Oh, hit again, Harrow. Save the boundary, Eton. . . . *Saved!* Oh, joy! . . . I say, *didn't* Billy move then? That's what I like to see. On the tips of his toes, like a racehorse. I wouldn't let anybody else have Billy for a brother for anything on earth—not even for a new tennis racquet.

MISS ROUT. What *is* your father?

LADY MARY (*anxious to let Miss Rout down easy*). A perfect duck of a thing.

MISS ROUT. Very likely. I mean, what's he do?

LADY MARY. Puts in a good time generally, according to himself.

MISS ROUT. Yes, but, my dear little girl, where does he get his money from?

LADY MARY. He doesn't get it from anywhere. He never has any.

MISS ROUT. Then why doesn't he get something to do?

LADY MARY. He can't. You see, he can't spell very well, poor old dear. He might go for a groom or a coachman, of course, as he knows more about a horse than a horse knows about himself; but it would be so rough on mother to find herself living in two rooms over a stable.

MISS ROUT. Well, if it's as bad as that, and as I've taken quite a fancy to you, I'll get my father to give him a job in the shop.

LADY MARY (*choking*). Oh, thank you.

MISS ROUT. Is he a respectable-lookin' man?

LADY MARY. Oh, quite. So clean, and with a lovely head of curly hair.

MISS ROUT. And could he wear a frock-coat, and say, "And the next article, madam?" in a nice persuasive manner?

LADY MARY (*holding the indignant Governess's hand tight*). Oh, rather. Father's very popular with women!

MISS ROUT. Give me his name and address, then, and I'll let my father have it at once.

LADY MARY (*suddenly*). There *is* father. What luck. May I introduce you?

MISS ROUT (*with her idea of a queenly smile*). Ah, do.

LADY MARY. But I don't know your name.

MISS ROUT. Miss Augusta Victoria Rosslyn Rout—of the firm of Messrs Ebenezer Rout & Son.

LADY MARY (*calling*). Father!

THE MARQUIS (*looking up*). Hillo, young 'un! Bought a coach?

LADY MARY (*winking at him*). Miss Rout, let me introduce my father, Lord Tonbridge. . . . Father, Miss Rout thinks she can get a place for you in her father's shop.

THE MARQUIS. Many thanks, Miss Rout. Your father and I are very old friends. (*Inwardly*) Owe the old bounder a pot o' money. Expect his writ every minute.

MISS ROUT (*blushing like a beetroot with pride, shame, nervousness*). Will you come up, my Lord? My father . . . (*with a sudden burst*) charges nothing for the seats. . . . Ha! ha!

[Tonbridge gets up and makes himself extremely polite to the daughter, in the hope that she may tell the father, and that it may influence a delay in sending in the writ. And both games proceed in the usual way.]



AT HENLEY

SCENE—*The roof of the Wee Willie Winkie, the enormous houseboat rented by Sir Joshua Bendyshe-Miggs, Bart., of table-knife and insect-powder fame, as, of course, you are well aware. It is the evening of the first day, after dinner. Consequently the three thousand fairy lamps which are hung round the outline of the barge, and between, in, and on top of the fifteen hundred pots of climbing geraniums, are alight, and the neighbouring houseboats, although crowded with various-coloured lamps, look almost feeble in comparison. Many people, whose faces are familiar from their constant appearance in and out of costume in front pages of weekly illustrated papers, are chatting here and there; but above the ripple of feminine laughter and the male guffaw can be heard the soft lapping of water against the sides of the barge, the tum-tum of many banjos, the nasal baritones of distant would-be mysterious musicians from third-rate music-halls, the florid jangle of many*

pianos, the sudden laugh amid-stream, and occasionally the melancholy, nagging voice of the pea-hen calling, perhaps, to her too convivial husband from the lawn of Hambleton. The still air is filled with the expensive scent of the well-known Bendyshe-Miggs cigar, which, as only the more adventurous members of the Peerage, the House of Commons, and the Turf are aware, bears the exceedingly amusing and, it must be owned, peculiarly ingenious Bendyshe-Miggs coat-of-arms upon its label.

THE DUCHESS (*coming on to the roof personally conducted by Sir Joshua, who naturally is a past master in the art*). My! ain't it 'eavenly! Upon my word, Sir Joshua, I never saw so many lights before, except outside that there Apollo Theatre. Knocks all the other boats stone dead, don't it?

SIR JOSHUA (*beaming in a wholesale manner and purring loudly*). Oh, yes, they're all right, Duchess, they're all right. Mind you, so they oughter be. Why, what d'yer think they cost me—lights alone, I mean?

THE DUCHESS. I dunno, my dear man, how should I? When I was on the stage I was never in management, y' know.

SIR JOSHUA (*impressively*). Every blessed farthing of

four 'undred pound ! A tidy bit o' money, what ? Still, I did very fairly well at Ascot by not backing my own gees ; so it's all right, Duchess, it's all right. It'll have a detailed description in the papers, y' know, with photos and a full list of guests, and it'll all come back ; it'll all come back. . . . Hah, Duchess, it's wonderful easy to do. All the equipment necessary is—

MYSTERIOUS MUSICIAN (*in punt with piano*) :—

“ Tact, tact,
Tike it fer a fact,
Juss try it, an' you'll find it will invariably act.
P'r'aps they told yer in yer youth
That there's nothing like ther truth—
But it reely can't compare at *all* with tact, tact, tact ;
No, it reely can't comp—”

SIR JOSHUA (*going quickly to the rail of the boat, rather redder in the ample face*). 'Ere you ! Pass on, please, pass on. (*He bitches them sixpence in coppers.*)

THE DUCHESS (*who has followed him, smiling whimsically*). But he's not so far out, after all, Sir Joshua. Eh, what ? Where would you and me be now, but for that not-to-be-purchased commodity ?

SIR JOSHUA (*letting all the veneer he possesses go overboard and laughing immoderately*). 'Ush, my dear Duchess, 'ush. It don't do to give it away. Let's tork

over old times. Dear, oh, dear, but it seems only yesterday that I wore an apron and used to go of an evening to the gallery of the old Vic. and 'ear you sing "Don't yer wish yer, wish yer, wish yer—"

THE DUCHESS (*with an ecstatic burst*). "Wish yer, wish yer was." . . . My goodness, shall I ever forget it? Eight pound a week, an old mother to keep, oyster suppers on Friday nights. . . . Ah, that was life, that was—*life*! But those days are dead and gone, worse luck, dead and gone!

MYSTERIOUS MUSICIAN (*some barges away*):—

"Ah! fer ther diys beyond retrievin',
Ah! fer ther golding diys,
Ah! fer ther diys be-e-yond re-tree-e-vi-hing,
Ah-ha-ha fer ther golding—"

THE DUCHESS (*stopping a hot tear at its birth*). Come away, old man, and let's talk of somethin' else. (*They cross to the bank side of the roof.*)

LORD ADOLPHUS CUMMING-PANNOX (*leaning on the rail and looking down at Mrs Billy Denham*). Yes, of course, Henley has degenerated into a beanfeast for shopkeepers; but, having been cleaned out at Ascot, I had to live somehow, and so I was obliged to accept three days' food from old Miggs—to say nothing of cigars.

MRS BILLY. He does one very proud, certainly; the

champagne to-night was like velvet. But, ye gods, what ostentation! Of course, one has to go with the times; but I'm not sure that I am yet educated up to being part and parcel of a huge advertising scheme.

LORD ADOLPHUS. It wants a bit of nerve, of course; but, don't you see, if we didn't let these shoppees and people run us, what in the world *should* we do for a livin'? Besides, what the dooce does any blessed thing matter if only we see each other sometimes?

MRS BILLY (*becoming natural*). Don't do that! People will talk.

LORD ADOLPHUS. People will talk whether I do it or not. Let 'em talk. You know jolly well that I—

MRS BILLY (*appealingly*). Oh! don't say it. You mustn't say it. Remember Billy—he's such a dear. Besides, what's the use? Why do you—

LORD ADOLPHUS (*leaning closer*). Why—why?

MYSTERIOUS MUSICIAN (*tremolo full on*):—

“You arst me whoy I love, when love shud be
A thing undreamed-uv, *dead*, 'twixt you an' me.
Yer moight hentreat ther stars ter cease ter shoine
As seek ter stiy so deep a love as—”

MRS BILLY (*getting up hastily and holding a twitching hand to her lips*). Oh, Dolly, *can't* you make him shut up? I *hate* and *loathe* that beast of a song.

INDISCRETIONS

[*Lord Adolphus, however, doesn't attempt to obey her instructions. He merely leans more carelessly against the rail, and looks down at poor little Mrs Billy with a curious smile. She catches the look, as the voice of a girl in the next houseboat is wafted towards them :—*

“ Ask nothing more of me, sweet ;
All that you ask for I give.
Heart of my heart, were it more,
More should be laid at your feet—
Love that would help you to live,
Song that would spur you to soar . . . ”

MRS BILLY (*shuddering*). But it wouldn't, Dolly, it wouldn't. Why—*why* won't you remember Billy ?

LORD ADOLPHUS (*swallowing something with a gulp and touching the back of her hand*). All right, I'll remember Billy—one of the *very* best is Billy. Only—only, like a Briton. Betty, my dear, do be very rude to me whenever I meet you again. Will you, just to help things a bit ?

MRS BILLY (*trying to smile and succeeding in crying*). I'll try, Dolly, I'll try—most awful hard !

[*She turns on her heel, meets Sir Joshua, perspiring with pride, and engages him in the brightest and most flippant conversation, in the usual way.*]

THE MARCHIONESS OF ST GILES (*speaking, of course, with a strong Transatlantic twang, to Captain Teddy Drayton*). Yes, but, say, what's it for, anyway?

DRAYTON (*with amused admiration*). What's what for—"anyway"?

THE MARCHIONESS (*waving her hand to the right and left*). This—the barge, all the barges, the boats jammed together all day like captured flies on sticky paper—the itinerant shoutists—the flunkeys—the whole kerfoozleum, so to speak.

DRAYTON. Oh, part of the price one pays for livin', don'tcher know? Don't yer like it?

THE MARCHIONESS (*making a Noo York mouth*). Um-um! So, so. I like the colour, the food, the people, the swishin' of the stream, and all that; but what I can't swaller are those boys who wait till all the cockle-boats are mixed up in one great uneasy heap, and then snort down the centre of the water for all they're worth. Makes one hot to see them, anyhow. What is it, anyway?

DRAYTON. It's the boys' show, really, which we are supposed to take an interest in.

THE MARCHIONESS. But you don't, do you?

DRAYTON. Oh, Lor', no—not we.

THE MARCHIONESS. Why do you come, then?

DRAYTON. For exactly the same reason as we go

everywhere else—the Opera, Ascot, Goodwood, Hurlin'am, and all the other haunts. Just to *be* there, and see it in the paper; to see who *isn't* there, and what who *is* is dressed in, and who its *with*; and generally to play the old, old game, you know. For a time it's rather a good game, played quickly. Then it palls—palls like the very dooce.

THE MARCHIONESS. And then what?

DRAYTON. And then? . . . Oh, well, and then one gathers the bits and pieces together, goes right away into the country, grows pigs, and becomes a D.L.

THE MARCHIONESS (*puzzled*). D.L.? D.L.? Oh, I take you. You mean a dam—

DRAYTON. No, I don't. I mean a Deputy-Lieutenant of the county.

[*The Marchioness looks disappointed, but goes off into a ripple of Transatlantic laughter—or perhaps "breaker" would be a better word than "ripple."*]

JACK (*the eldest son of the host, who is to stroke the Eton boat, to Effie, his cousin*). I say.

EFFIE (*without looking up*). Say away.

JACK. Are you glad you came down?

EFFIE. Um.

JACK. Beastly glad?

EFFIE (*smiling*). Um.

JACK. Most awfully beastly glad?

EFFIE (*blushing*). Um.

JACK (*blundering a little*). I—I—s—say, I shall soon be a man now, you know, and all that. I'm going into the Service—cavalry. Spurs always make such a rippin' row. But—but before anybody else comes along, will you swear, by all you hold sacred, that you'll never—like anybody else? That you'll wait for me?

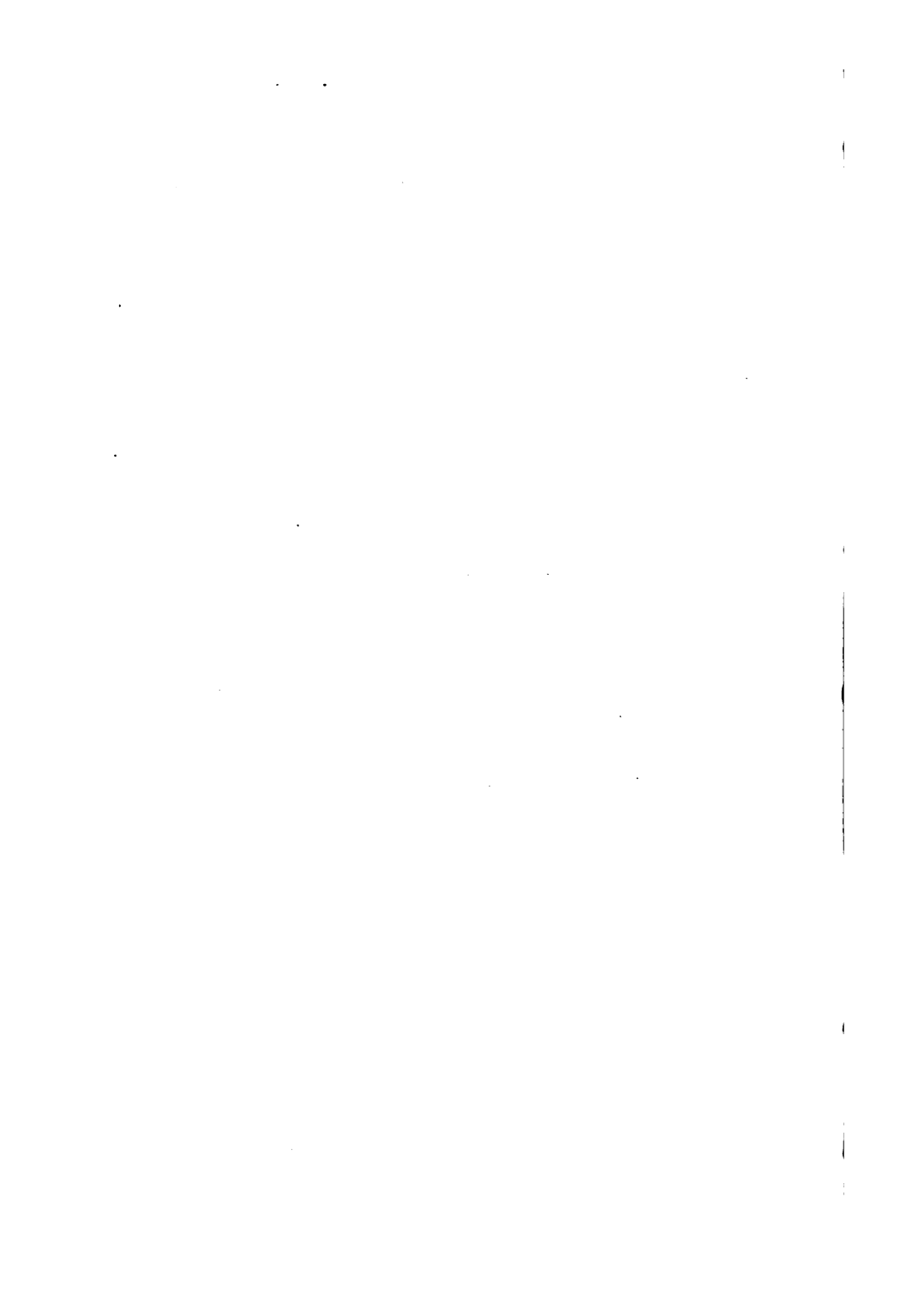
EFFIE (*after a little pause, holding her head so that Jack can't see her face, upon which there is a radiant smile*). Why?

JACK (*longing to take her hand, but not having sufficient pluck*). Why, Effie—darling, because, because—

MYSTERIOUS MUSICIAN (*in the distance*):—

“I want yer, ma honey, yeth, I want yer ebery minute;
I'm thinkin' ob yer daily, and nobody elth ith in it.
So come back to please me, don't try for to tease me,
For I want yer, ma honey, yeth, I want yer, want yer, want yer,
I want yer, ma honey—”

JACK (*seizing the hand in question roughly*). Yes, I do.



COWES—AND THE CREAM

SCENE—*The deck of the Mosquito, owned by Mr and Mrs Van der Squish D. Taut, of Omaha, U.S.A. It is after dinner, and the distinguished guests of the Hydraulic King are playing poker under the awning, from which hang bunches of electric lights. Round the table are Van der Squish D. Taut himself, an excessively stout man, with a look about his large, square-jawed, clean-shaven face of a Scotch Free Kirk minister; the Duke of Buxton, perky, alert, and full of a sparrow-like wit; Lord Alistair Cupar-Drumbittie, the latest V.C., whose queer, sloppy laugh continually puckers up his freckled features and sends his red eyebrows up to the region of his redder hair; Mrs Bristowe-Brummell, a good lady with the face of a Madonna and the heart of a gargoyle; the Hon. Esmé Gussup, a feminine man, who pays more attention to the new design of a collar than to the fall of a Ministry, and whose brain is like wax to receive impressions, and a hair-dresser*

to spread them about ; Mrs Van der Squish D. Taut, a good-natured, vivacious woman, to whom everything is new and to be "done," and who tries very hard to conceal a particularly thick accent with peculiarly amusing results ; and Lady Cedric Lessness, a patrician to the tips of her exquisitely-shaped fingers, who, dressed almost egregiously well, looks like a Romney among a prize selection of the work of the students of a suburban art class.

The night is something approaching Venetian, and the lights of Cowes and of the many yachts to the fore and aft look as though they were pinned to a huge piece of blue-black paper. A gentle lapping of water accompanies the sympathetic strings of Mr Taut's celebrated private orchestra, which is playing "All Souls' Day." There is a ring of passionate triumph in the voice of the first violin.

Everybody, except Lady Cedric Lessness, rises from the table, with, in most cases, well-simulated laughter.

ESMÉ GUSSUP (*beckoning mysteriously to Mrs Bristowe-Brummell.*) I say. S-s-s-h ! I want to speak to you, dear lady.

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL (*pricking up her ears*).

Um! um! What is it?

ESMÉ GUSSUP. Come over here. I—I don't want to buck, but I really fancy I've spotted something quite—quite interesting.

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL (*with great eagerness*). Not cheatin'?

ESMÉ GUSSUP. No, not cheating, worse luck; but rather spicy, all the same. First of all, just have a look at the giddy Lessness.

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL (*quite sincerely*). How I hate that woman! How dare she be so exquisitely beautiful?

ESMÉ GUSSUP. Don't talk so loud! . . . Beautiful? Look at her now. She looks like a woman who, having been hauled away from the edge of a crumbling cliff at the moment of a landslip, creeps to the new edge, and looks over at the bit she was standing on lying in a heap on the shingle!

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL. I didn't notice anything. What on earth makes her look like that? As a rule nothing affects her. She's as hard as a nail.

ESMÉ GUSSUP (*in his element*). I'll tell yer. D'yer mind my smoking a cigarette? No? Tha-anks. . . . Quite unusually, the giddy Lessness, who was bettin' and bluffin' in her usual heavy-handed way, was losin

hand over fist to What's-his-name Taut, who held the finest hands I've ever seen. Fives, and Royal flushes, and all the rest of it—simply unbeatable. I watched her turnin' greener and greener, but the more she lost the more she bluffed, the higher she gambled, and the whiter she became about the gills. Didn't yer notice her?

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL. No; I was much too busy trying to win a bit from our host.

ESMÉ GUSSUP. At last, when it came to settling up on the game, after the last round of jackpots, "Lady Cedric," said Taut, in the voice generally adopted by an irregular sky-pilot when he announces the end of the second lesson, "owes the bank two hundred pounds." She shut her teeth with such a bang that I jumped in my seat.

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL. I wonder they didn't fall out, plate and all.

ESMÉ GUSSUP. Everybody else paid up and was paid, and got up, thankful to get a stretch. But the giddy Lessness still sat on, looking at the table with a fixed, hideous smile. Instinctively I chucked a glance at old U. S. A. His face was a study. Quite quiet, looking more solemn than we are led to suppose the last of the Mohicans looked, he sat opposite to her, studying her, and thinkin' hard.

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL (*tapping her toe impatiently*). Cut the cackle, Esmé, and come to the point.

ESMÉ GUSSUP. My dear lady, no dish is worth the eating without the necessary trimmings. Suddenly a streak of understanding went over Taut's pudden face. He gave a quick look at everybody still standing round the table, and then said, "You owe the bank two hundred pounds, Lady Cedric"—I can't imitate his accent, so it's no use tryin'—"and the bank owes you two hundred and fifty. Therefore, if the bank pays you fifty, so"—and he handed over the notes—"you and I are quits, anyway."

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL. What did she say? Because, of course, he didn't owe her the money!

ESMÉ GUSSUP. Of course he didn't, dear lady, of course he didn't. That's the point. He saw that she couldn't pay. She and Cedric haven't a bob between 'em, I know. How she does things beats me! And so he dubbed up, puttin' an extra bit on for reasons into which it would be unwise of us to inquire. . . . He, he!

MRS BRISTOWE-BRUMMELL (*the moonlight falling gently on her Madonna face*). He! he! . . . Yes, for all her high-bred manner and haughty ways, I always suspected she was one of that sort. And she is what our American

called "the cream"—"Cowes and the cream," to quote him fully.

ESMÉ GUSSUP. Look out! Here they come! . . . Really, and so you actually don't care about the flavour of an escallop, eh? *Chacun à son goût*, but—

[*Exchanging winks full of meaning, Esmé and the Madonna fade discreetly into the shadow.*]

MR TAUT. . . . And, for that reason, Lady Cedric, we, on our side, get through more electricity in a day than you over here can push into a week.

LADY CEDRIC (*clasp ing her hands tight*). Mr Taut, don't tell me anything more about electricity. I—I—

MR TAUT (*with a strange old-fashioned bow*). My dear Lady Cedric, I ask your pardon. Shop to me is second nature; I forgot that to you it must be—

LADY CEDRIC (*almost hysterically*). No, no; I don't mean that, Mr Taut. I mean that, before anything else is said, I *must* thank you, earnestly, deeply, with all my heart, for—for—

MR TAUT. My dear Lady Cedric, please do not trouble to refer to the matter. . . . Do you see those lights yonder, on the—

LADY CEDRIC. You saved me from looking foolish before all these people. I—I am more than grateful, Mr Taut, and I will repay you as—as—

MR TAUT. Thank you. Any time that is convenient to you is convenient to me. But, while we are on this subject, may I presume so far as to give you a word of advice?

LADY CEDRIC (*hanging her head*). I know what you are going to say.

MR TAUT (*very gently*). Yes, that's so. I never do anything I can't afford myself, and I don't like to see anyone else doing so, anyway.

LADY CEDRIC (*with a burst*). You! You! There is nothing you can't afford, while I have to earn the living of my husband and myself.

MR TAUT (*looking at Lady Cedric with grave surprise*). Living! By bluffing at poker!

LADY CEDRIC. Yes, why not? Poor old Cedric lost the little we had gambling in stocks and shares—trying to make ten thousand pounds into a hundred thousand, in the usual way—and then it preyed on his dear old worrying mind so much that he had a stroke of paralysis, and now—now “Handsome Lessy” is all twisted and useless (*her voice breaks*), and is doomed to a Bath-chair for the rest of his life. . . . To ease his mind, I lied to him and told him that an aunt had left me enough for us to get along upon with care, and he insists on my going about—dear old boy!—and I'm obliged to go to make the money to boil the pot. Oh! it's not a charm-

ing position ! I know that. And I wish to Heaven I might never see a card again. You can't touch poverty without touching pitch, but, thank God ! our love hasn't gone out of the window, or it might be infinitely worse than it is. (*Shaken, humiliated, and very overwrought, the poor woman leans over the bulwarks, hiding her face in her hands.*)

[*There is a pause. Esmé and Mrs Bristowe-Brummell stop breathing, still listening with all their now extremely surprised ears.*]

MR TAUT (*who has been rubbing his large hand nervously up and down his upper lip, sometimes catching up a little moisture in the neighbourhood of his eyes*). Lady Cedric, before everything else I am a business man ; so you'll forgive me if what I am about to say is not put so—so nicely as it might be. You are a very beautiful woman—very high up, I take it, in English society. Therefore you know everybody, and everything, whom one ought to know, and how the things should be done. My wife—

LADY CEDRIC (*looking up eagerly*). Oh, Mr Taut !

MR TAUT. One moment, Lady Cedric. My wife—is ambitious of knowing everybody and doing everything ; but I should like her to have as a guide a lady who is as

good, as noble-hearted, as self-sacrificing as a lady whose friend I should esteem it a great honour to be—I mean Lady Cedric Lessness.

LADY CEDRIC (*hardly able to speak*). Oh, Mr Taut!

MR TAUT. The question of out-of-pocket expenses—

LADY CEDRIC (*making a quick movement*). Er—

MR TAUT (*gently*). Forgive me, but this is the business part. In my mind, before asking you this favour, I had estimated three thousand a year for this purpose. But if—

LADY CEDRIC (*catching his hand*). Three—three! Oh, Mr Taut, I—I have no—no words—no words—

MR TAUT. Let us go and find my dear wife. Er—it is certainly one of the most beautiful evenings I ever remember. How quiet the place is! How restful and—

[*They pass out of hearing. For some reason best known to themselves Esmé Gussup and the woman with the Madonna face, who have been eavesdropping, creep away without catching each other's eyes.*]

THE DESERTED CITY

SCENE — *The upper path alongside the Row. As is usual in mid-August, the green seats—perhaps the most uncomfortable the world contains—have been tilted over, and are leaning, in their peculiarly stiff way, shoulder to shoulder, as far as the eye can see without assistance. The sun is blazing. On the free seats, under the dusty, comatose trees, the lower ten are sleeping solidly, in unpicturesque attitudes. Through the trees to the left the incessant 'bus can be seen passing along the Knights-bridge high road. The sound of its rumble mixes faintly with the chirping of shrewd sparrows, the occasional bugle-call from the barracks, the falsetto of a child's laugh, the insolent rattle of distant motor cars. In the Row, one or two pedestrians bob uncomfortably along on obviously hired horses, and sometimes the gleam of a nursemaid's white frock can be seen on the bank of the Serpentine.*

MAJOR AUBREY SEEND (*a tall, drawn-faced, tired-*
D

looking man, limping along on two sticks). Ha! Well, I'm dashed! Ha! (*There is something very like a sneer in his short laugh.*)

MR BULWELL DINTING, M.P. (*a dapper, pompous, empty-headed little person—a typical private member*). Why that "Ha," my dear Aubrey, hey? Why that "Ha"?

SEEND (*stopping short, and waving one of his sticks slowly round*). Because of this, Dinting, this.

DINTING (*peering after the stick in a short-sighted manner*). This? Well, what about it? I don't see anything. What d'yer mean, Aubrey?

SEEND. I mean all that you can see, all that you can hear, all that you can feel—London—hurrying, worrying, ugly, dear old London.

DINTING. Oh, that! Oh, ah! yes. The deserted City. Eh, what?

SEEND. Deserted, do y' call it? If I was silly fool enough to fag at it, I could count thousands of bodies lying on the grass yonder.

DINTING. Of course you could, and millions out in the streets. But they don't count. London is empty. The House is risen. We are all away—except me, and I'm off to-morrow.

SEEND (*limping on again—with a sigh which might just as well be of satisfaction as of regret*). Well,

I never expected to see you again, London, my London.

DINTING. No? no? Ah, poor old Aubrey! They told me you got a bit mauled in that quixotic action of yours. What was it you did again? Stopped behind single-handed and spiked the guns under a withering fire, in order that the peaceful farmer shouldn't be able to use 'em against you—or something equally stoopid?

SEEND (*glancing at the little man in gleaming spats with a smile*). Yes, either that or something equally "stoopid."

DINTING (*in imagination catching the Speaker's eye*). And yet there is a section in this House which would have other nations believe that heroism has died out among the British!

SEEND (*roughly*). Heroism be blowed! The motive prompting me to risk my life was cowardice. Put that in your pipe, Mr Bulwell Dinting, M.P.

DINTING (*startled into dropping his eyeglass*). C—c—cowardice! My very dear Aubrey, what *do* you mean?

SEEND (*hurrying forward with averted face*). Just exactly what I say, Dinting. Nothing more or less.

DINTING (*thinking as hard as a private member is capable of thinking*). Cowardice? . . . Ah, I have it.

Cowardice because you didn't do it from patriotic motives, for the prestige of British arms, but because, being unable to face the future with any satisfaction to yourself, you wanted to commit suicide without putting a coroner to the trouble of bringing in a verdict of unsound mind. Ah! got it in once. Eh, what?

SEEND (*his face growing more drawn, more spiritless than ever*). In once, yes, What an ornament you must be to your party!

DINTING (*strutting like a bantam cock after a prolonged crow*). An ornament? Oh, no, my dear Aubrey, not an ornament. Hardly, perhaps, that. But I don't really mind your putting me down as a piece of Turkey carpet among an assortment of odd pieces of common oilcloth. Ha, ha!

SEEND (*slightly amused*). "Quoth the captain, make it so."

DINTING (*with cheerful condescension*). But, of course, knowing the full particulars of the case, my dear Aubrey, I quite see your point of view.

SEEND (*a little impatiently*). The full particulars of what case?

DINTING. My dear Aubrey, your case, your case. If I had been in your shoes—

SEEND. Boots, little man. I never wear anything else.

DINTING (*waving his nicely-gloved hand*). Boots, then. I say, if I had been in your boots I am not prepared to say that I too should not have won the D.S.O. for a similar act of cowardice. Indeed, my dear Aubrey, now that you have brought up this painful subject, I should like to take the opportunity of telling you how deeply, how immeasurably, I sympathise with—

SEEND (*hastily*). Quite so. Thankee. Nice day, ain't it?

DINTING (*with a roguish smile*). My dear Aubrey, you can't put an old parliamentary hand off like that. I can't forget that you and I were at school together—that I was, as a point of fact, your fag-master; and whether you like it or not, I shall say what's on my mind in regard to what I call the—the abominable, the—the base conduct of your wife with—

SEEND (*his voice trembling*). Shut up, Dinting, please. My wife was—was not to blame.

DINTING (*gasping*). Not to—Good gad! . . . Not to blame for waiting till you were well out of the way, fighting your country's battles, and then calmly and in cold blood to pack up her traps and go off with another man? Not to blame! By Jove (*his little body swells and his neck becomes a vivid pink*), if my wife served me a trick like that, do you—do you know what *I* should do?

SEEND (*shaking his head*). No, and I don't think I'm awfully keen.

DINTING (*showing his teeth like a terrier*). I shouldn't divorce her, Aubrey. Oh, Lor', no, because then she might possibly persuade the chap she ran off with to marry her. I should wait until the inevitable moment when, the chap being sick of her, she came trotting back to me, repentant and full of pathos, wearing the Magda cloak and the Tanqueray skirt—a little soiled at the hem, don't yer know—to kiss again with tears. And then do you know what I should do, hey?

SEEND. Take her back, like a sportsman.

DINTING (*at the top of his bronchial little voice*). Take her back? Oh, my dear, foolish, soft-hearted Aubrey! (*gripping his little cane and swishing the air with amusing ferocity*). I should slap her face, and tell the servants to pitch her out into the street, into the gutter, to her sisters, and if ever she came crawling round the house again to give her in charge. Do you see?

SEEND (*with a glint of rage in his eye*). I see.

DINTING. And when your wife, who never loved you, Aubrey, not even when she married you—everybody knows that—when your wife comes crawling back to you, as of course she will, don't you be a soft-hearted fool and take her back and give her a roof. Pitch her out, my

boy, pitch her out, and let her starve in the streets as a punishment.

SEEND (*quietly*). Let me see. Your guv'nor was a parson, wasn't he? A dean or a canon?

DINTING. A canon, yes. Why?

SEEND. Nothing. I only wanted to know.

DINTING (*suddenly gripping Seend's arm, with a chuckle*). By gad, now, how extraordinary! Talk of the—well, talk of a fallen angel and here she comes. Look yonder. Coming towards us, eyes on the path, pale, pathetic—

SEEND (*stopping short*). Is it my—my—

DINTING. The woman who still has the right to call herself Lady Helen Seend? Oh, yes, here she comes on the way to your house to ask a jaunty forgiveness, just in the old sweet way. Now, Aubrey, no trembling, no moral cowardice. Be brave, show a little of your S. A. pluck. I'll stick to you, and when you fail for stinging, domestic, unparliamentary English, turn to—

SEEND (*suddenly jerking his elbow into Dinting's little mouth*). Shut up, you—you Christian. . . . If you're not out of sight in five minutes I'll pitch you neck and crop into the Serpentine.

[*With his scented handkerchief to his mouth and his tail between his legs Mr Bulwell Dinting, M.P.,*

turns and retraces his steps as quickly as the shortness of his legs will allow. Leaning heavily on his sticks, with a great eagerness in his eyes, Seend waits in the middle of the path.]

SEEND (*eager, tremblingly*). Nell!

LADY HELEN (*looking up as his shadow falls in front of her*). Aubrey!

SEEND. Nell—oh, my dear, dear old chap (*clutching both sticks in one hand, he throws the other hand round her shoulder*). Don't draw away.

LADY HELEN. But you—you oughtn't to touch me, Aubrey.

SEEND. Are you afraid of people seeing? It's all right. They call this the Deserted City. There is nobody here but other maimed and wounded people.

LADY HELEN. I don't mean that. I mean—oh, Aubrey—I mean—after what I've done.

SEEND. What does anything matter now? I've found you.

LADY HELEN. But you don't know.

SEEND. Yes, I do.

LADY HELEN. But you can't, you can't, or you would not be so kind.

SEEND. I love you, dear old chap, and there's an end of it.

LADY HELEN. Oh, Aubrey. Can you—may I, dare I ever ask you to take me back again, after—after—

SEEND (*leading her to a seat, on the other end of which is huddled a bundle of rags*). My dear, if I had never done anything I could feel ashamed of, in all probability I should have cut you dead and gone about in smug mourning. But my life is green with patches of wild oats, and you are much too good a woman for me. We have both been under fire, and got a bit maimed. Let's go home and see to each other's wounds. They say you—you didn't love me when you married me, old chap. Will you think it over when we get home, and see if you can't find a bit for me stowed away somewhere, darling?

LADY HELEN (*putting her head down on his crippled leg*). Oh, Aubrey!

[*And as the incessant 'bus passes in the distance, and the shrewd sparrows chirp, and children laugh, and the many millions of the Deserted City bend under the yoke, there is silence on the seat. But the woman under the bundle of rags gets softly up and creeps away on tiptoe, with tears upon her painted face.*]



A WELL-EARNED REST

SCENE—*The Wooburn-Worthings' place on the banks of the Thames, near the desecrated Abbey of Medmenham. It is the first Sunday after Goodwood, and t'he world, panting, pale and worn out after its two months' exertion, is lying on its back in the shade, with its hat tilted over its nose, so to speak.*

Mrs Wooburn-Worthing, made up less cleverly than usual, but looking, nevertheless, anything between eighteen and twenty-three under a monstrous poppy-crowned Panama hat, is leaning back in a straw deck chair, and in her peculiarly dexterous manner is showing very slightly more than an extremely neat ankle.

Dear old Lady Walter Shrewd is seated in a quite elderly arm-chair by her side, a series of utterly unmanageable curves, clothed in spotted foulard.

In the distance Colonel Wooburn-Worthing can be seen lying on a dozen scarlet pillows, in rumped ducks,

reading a paper the colour of the pillows with an expression of quiet glee.

At the end of the lawn lies the river in a comatose condition, but ploughed up every two minutes by fussy launches, energetic randans, imperturbable punts, and inconsistent canoes.

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING (*with a long sigh*). Ah-h-h.

LADY WALTER. Tired, my dear?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. My dear Lady Walter, tired is not the word. I am thoroughly exhausted, I feel like—like a horse when it gets back to its oats after having done the work of two. In short, if ever there were a worm on this earth I am he—or she, or it, which ever gender a worm generally is.

LADY WALTER (*a little hoarsely*). He! he! But, you see, my dear, if people go in for such a quiverful of gels, they must expect to work to get 'em off.

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. Phew! but *how* I've worked. A Trojan is a sluggard compared to me.

LADY WALTER. He! he! What do you know about Trojans?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING (*with a touch of very natural conceit*). Unlike most army men, dear Lady Walter, my husband had a classical education.

LADY WALTER (*dryly*). Um! and I suppose that's the reason he sees the points of those jokes in that Saturday paper he is gloating over, eh? He! he!

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING (*ignoring the remark*). At the beginning of the season I said to Tom, "Tom, I am as near to forty-five as—as—'As damit,' said Tom."

LADY WALTER. He! he! Great boy, Tom.

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. "Exactly," said I. "Jean is twenty-three, Pamela twenty-two, Patricia twenty-one, and Muriel twenty."

LADY WALTER (*for no apparent reason*). He! he!

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. "Now," I continued, "whatever we have to spend in laying the nets and spreading the birdlime, I am determined, whether it reduces me to a rag at the end of it, to get all the girls off my hands by the end of the season."

LADY WALTER. What did Tom say?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING (*scornfully*). Oh, he said what all men—the unsympathetic pigs—say: "Leave 'em alone, and let 'em find the right chap for themselves."

LADY WALTER. And what did you say?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. I said what all sensible and devoted mothers say under similar circumstances. I said, "My dear Tom, I am approaching that time of

life when it doesn't do for a woman to be seen about with unmarried daughters who look older than herself. It's a bad thing for the daughters in that the mother keeps all the boys away from them, and it's a worse thing for the mother, in that if she flirts with the boys—it's only human—the daughters will eventually become mill-stones round her neck. Besides, at forty-five a woman needs a free hand to be able to put in a good time on her own."

LADY WALTER. He! he! and what did Tom say to that?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. He guffawed, and said something I didn't understand, which he swore was a quotation from Bernard Shaw or Rochefoucauld or some such person.

LADY WALTER. A bit of both very likely, my dear. And how did the discussion end?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. As it invariably ends. I started a liver tonic, girded up my loins for action, so to speak, and sent all the girls to bait their hooks at the crack dressmakers'. We went up to Cadogan Square on the last day of May, and I have been going at full bat after our four quarries ever since. But oh! the joy, the relief, in running them to earth. My dear Lady Walter, if ever a woman said her prayers for all they were worth, that woman was myself when Mendelssohn's hackneyed

march filled St George's, Hanover Square, for the fourth time.

LADY WALTER. But, my dear soul, you ain't goin' to try and make me believe that you engaged 'em one minute and married 'em the next?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. My dear Lady Walter, I can't help what you would like to believe. The fact remains. Let me tell you that when I put my shoulder to the wheel I don't cry a halt for breathing purposes till I have shoved the cart to the top of the hill. Then ha!—ha!—I have a rest.

LADY WALTER. Yes—he! he! Well, my dear, I like your pluck. And now tell me what kind of fish you landed. Remember, I have only just returned from drinking filthy waters at an evil-smelling German hole, and know nothing.

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING (*with a glow of very natural pride*). They were, you'll be glad to hear, all salmon, very weighty, with scales full of silver—if you know what I mean. I bottled old Mr Kennedy Fluglass, the banker, for dear Pamela, first. I cornered him at Hurlingham. He is—er—a delightful person, worth about a million. For a mere Englishman, that's a sum no conscientious mother can afford to sneeze at. Pamela was—er—very good about it. She accepted first and cried afterwards. Then I clutched young Ronny

Gulliver, dear old Lord Swift's eldest boy, for Jean at the Sheen House Club, on the second evening of the Widows' and Orphans' Bazaar thing. The lights and the band were of great assistance.

LADY WALTER. Young Gulliver? But tell me, ain't that young man generally supposed to be a bit strange in the upper range?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. My dear Lady Walter, at the moment he is in receipt of seventeen thousand a year, and when poor dear old Swift puts his other foot into the grave he will have seventy thousand a year. *That* is quite all right, don't you know. I had the infinite satisfaction of snatching him out of the mouths, as it were, of five other deserving mothers. Quite a score. Ascot did the trick for me in regard to Patricia. I found that dear child a trifle difficult. She had been jibbing a good deal and I was obliged to speak quite seriously to her about the future. I hinted at a convent, don't you know. That acted excellently. It appeared that she was a bit gone on a boy in a marching regiment, with about eighteenpence to live on besides his pay, which is—what is it? Two shillings a day in the line for a subaltern. I laid the birdlime for Reginald Fannington, the K.C., all along the verandah of the cottage we rented at Ascot and asked him to dinner. I must say Patty played up well. I left them together and

she metaphorically pushed him into the lime ; I couldn't have done it better myself. He stuck splendidly. I think they'll be—er—very, very happy.

LADY WALTER. He ! he ! Sure to be, poor dears, and your youngest—that sweet-faced gel, with shy ways, to whom I took quite a fancy ?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. Oh, Muriel ? Ah ! now there I began to despair. What with the war and the slump on the Stock Exchange there were so few men left. However, I discovered a man who was absolutely made for Muriel, quite by accident at dinner at Carlton House Terrace. She loathed the sight of him, poor dear, but, of course, that didn't matter. He is not so young as he might be, and his head *is*, I must say, almost indecently bald, but I gave him a bottle of a very nice hair-coaxer as a wedding present, and possibly—I say possibly, because sometimes hair-coaxers are a little erratic—that may be remedied. He's in the House.

LADY WALTER. Which house ?

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. Not the Stock Exchange, the Commons ; but he's really quite a well-bred person, nevertheless. About eight thousand a year. Not much perhaps, but he's past what you might call his present-giving days—his pantomania, so to speak—and so dear Muriel will have a fair sum to play with annually. His name is Jokester ; he's a nice private member—one of

those men who says nothing and does all the more, don't you know—and he's one of the Jokesters of—of—oh! I forget the county, but it is quite one of those marriages which are made in heaven, as they say.

LADY WALTER. He! he!

MRS WOOBURN-WORTHING. *But*—oh, my dearest Lady Walter, the work, the expense, the watchfulness, the power of persuasion, the sinking of self I have been called upon to make these last eventful months! As I said to Tom when we came here from Goodwood, "Tom, looking back upon our married life, I'm not sure that if I had my time over again I should—" However, Lady Walter, that doesn't matter. I am worn out, of course. It will, indeed, be weeks and weeks before I shall be able to throw myself again into the vortex. But, as I sit here and repair ravages, I shall at least have the infinite satisfaction of knowing that, whatever anyone may say or think, mine is a well-earned rest; that, indeed and indeed, I have done my duty as a good mother to my dear, de-dear ch-children.

LADY WALTER (*after an infinitesimal pause, with infinite meaning*). He! he!

BY THE SILVER SEA

SCENE—*The Brighton Beach, 12 a.m. on a hot July day.*

The air is alight with countless white hot specks, one half of which, with infinite cunning, is chasing the other half, which dodge so skilfully, with such superb gymnasticism, as to convince one not only that specks go to school, but that they go to public schools. It is also filled with the persuasive voices of the Hokey-Pokey merchant: the lessees of the Jerusalem ass, the purveyor of sherbet, of children, either in delight, abject misery, anger, or a combination of the lot, and with the notes of callous cornets, pessimistic pianos, accompanying the nasal bellowing of itinerant musicians from Whitechapel. Every now and then the Brighton Queen gives a shriek of derision as adventurous people hurry upon her deck, little dreaming of the agonies they are to endure before she returns them to dry land.

MISS LETITIA CREEK (*from Bayswater, who is reposing upon the beach in her usual irreproachable manner on an*

outspread Modern Society, in a dress of white voile at least twenty-one years too young for her, speaking to her maid, a diplomatic female with a melted-butter manner and a voice which sounds like Lithia water being poured out of a seltzer-gene by an irritable sea captain—a simile in which there is a good deal more than meets the unassisted eye). Oh, Meekin, do, *do* look at those sweet pets, with their garments tucked up, with the baby waves kissing their rosebud toes! Doesn't it almost *unman* one to see a sight so—so exquisite?

MEEKIN (*aching to smack the little beggars for giving such ear-piercing yells*). It do, miss, it do that, and no error.

MISS CREEK (*who is, it will be gathered, a keen admirer of Miss Corelli and John Oliver Hobbes*). Their delicate, unthought-out attitudes, their supreme *insouciance*, the *joie de vivre*. . . .

MEEKIN (*with intense admiration*). Ah!

MISS CREEK (*repeating, with even more relish*). The *joie de vivre* which is so easily detected in the *timbre* of their unstained voices!

MEEKIN. Ah-h!

MISS CREEK (*almost nervous at her unwonted flow of journalese—feminine gender*). The—the—the—in short, the whole effect generally. I am sure you will not think that I am drawing on my imagination, Meekin; but

once, not so very long ago, I, too, was a little angel with my garments tucked up, with the baby waves kissing my rosebud toes—once.

DISTANT NASAL VOICE (*con amore, poco agitato*):—

“Ush, little biby, don’t you cry,
You’ll be a h’angel biy an’ biy,
Singin’ sweetly all ther diy,
All ther diy, ther bloomin’ diy.”

MEEKIN (*involuntarily*). He! he! he!—Oh, Lor’!

MISS CREEK (*going straight on*). Yes, and once, Meekin, many years intervening—and I give you my word I was *most* careful—I paddled, and was discovered by a gentleman. We—we got to know each other—how, I don’t remember. I was sweet seventeen, and he—he was six-and-thirty, and my heart went out to his in one wild leap.

MEEKIN (*introspectively*). Ah! Mine’s lep’ like that frequent: but nothin’ ’as hever come of it, not yet.

MISS CREEK. And once, Meekin, before his ten days were up and he returned to his bank in the Strand, he raised my hands to his lips, and said, his voice blurred with emotion, “Oh!” he said, “if only I’d met you eighteen months ago,” he said; “as it is I am engaged to another,” he said; “and now—”

INDISCRETIONS

DISTANT NASAL VOICE (*allegro con moto*):—

“ It was surely fite,
Some must luv too lite
And others a world too soon !
Let the curting fall,
Could I take your all
And give you so little ?—ah, noa ! ”

MISS CREEK (*hunting for her handkerchief*). Dear me ! How ex—ex—extraordinarily appropriate, M—M—Meekin.

DISTANT NASAL VOICE (*agitato*):—

“ Tho' it wrung your heart,
It was best to part
And better to let you goa ! ”

MEEKIN. So I should think. Deceivin' young feller. And 'im in a bank !

MISS CREEK (*sniffing and using her handkerchief with great care*). He married the other lady, and, as you well know, Meekin, it broke my heart, took the sun out of my day, and made me what I am.

MEEKIN (*not unsympathetically, but with true womanly curiosity*). And was that the only result, miss ?

MISS CREEK (*with a sad smile*). It has been a trying thing, Meekin, to go about, week in, week out, year after year, knowing that the worm—to use the language of the poet—was in the bud, and seeing it feeding on my

damask cheek. But I have been brave, I think, and have worn the mask well. As I go my daily round, even my opposite neighbour doesn't know that I am a woman with a secret sorrow.

DISTANT NASAL VOICE (*con spirito*):—

“ Oh, Pirouette, she is yet to be met,
As a dancer adored and renowned ;
She 'as broken 'er 'eart,
But she's playin' er part,
Goin' rarnd an' rarnd, an' rarnd an' rarnd,
For ever she 'as ter go rarnd.”

MISS CREEK (*with a sudden, almost girlish excitement*).
Oh, Meekin, I've got an irresistible longing—almost an overwhelming temptation—to paddle once again. Would you—would you do it too, just for a few minutes?

MEEKIN. Wouldn't I, miss!

MISS CREEK—Hurry then, Meekin, hurry. (*They both begin to draw off their shoes and other necessary and artistic implements of feminine furniture.*) Oh, I shall feel young again, a girl once more, a girl full of fun and the joy of life! Oh, Meekin, what a horrid thing love can be if it likes—and what a beautiful thing! For love's sweet sake I—an old woman—am going to be a girl again.

DISTANT NASAL VOICE (*molto espressivo*—as the two
odd figures pick their way carefully down to the sea):—

“ Ah ! Luv his ther power that rules fer hever ;
Luv is ther hall consumin’ fire ;
Luv is ther faith that wearies never ;
Luv is ther wo-o-orld’s desire.”

AT THE END OF THE PIER

Any pier. But the month must be August, and the sun must be shining. There must also be sea swishing up against iron supports; perforated iron steps leading down to a dangerous-looking under-pier, from which Ocean Belles, Swallows, and Sunbeams hang about, blowing sirens and making other sounds of enticement to attract the adventurous public; lots of little boys and undersized men holding bits of string in the sea, baited with lumps of sop, for no other purpose, so far as can be gathered, than to acquire patience and optimism. Here and there also, at the end of the pier, must be huts painted green and white, in some of which must be performing dogs, in others Neapolitan ices, Bass's beer, camera obscura, muto-scopes, in which can be discovered excellent specimens of American ugliness on payment of pennies, and a large assortment of literature in which you must rub shoulders with the giddy duchess, the merry marchioness, the eager earl, the naughty knight, and

the bold, bad baronet. Wherever possible, there must be a penny-in-the-slot machine, in which, after thrusting your shrewd brown into the appointed slit, you may test the condition of your lungs, heart and liver, tell your weight, age, pecuniary position, disposition, talents and place of birth, and discover when you will be, with whom you will be, how many times you will be, and why you hitherto have not been, married, and whether she or he, as the case may be, is dark, fair or non-descript, false, true, or both. From the Belles must rise the sound of topical airs scratched out by vile violins and pulled out of hoary harps; from the Mary Anns and Lady Godivas and other shilling sailing boats, which are passing and re-passing the end of the pier, domestic music performed by conceited cornets and consumptive concertinas, accompanied by voices, male and female.

RETIRED COLONEL (*who resides in the place, sits on the local Bench, and on the Town Council, to his daughter, who is on a first visit*). Hah! grand! Just smell the sea, my dear love. Open your mouth as wide as it will go—so—and take it in by the bucket full! (*Confidentially.*) My dear, people may say what they like, but I hold that this is the finest sea, the finest pier, the finest front, the finest watering-place on any coast; but, above all, the

finest pierhead in any country. I should like you to agree with me, my dear, because, otherwise, I shall be unable to stick to English which used to be called Parliamentary before the House of Commons so frequently forgot itself.

HIS DAUGHTER (*who is married to a man in Coutts's Bank, lives in West Kensington, is a member of the Welcome Club, and is therefore quite "in the movement"*). I should very much like to agree with you, papa, but—

RETIRED COLONEL (*bristling*). *But?* But what, good Gad!

HIS DAUGHTER. But I am afraid it is a rather unfortunate time of year to judge it as it should be judged. The—the great unwashed—

RETIRED COLONEL. We are delighted to see 'em. We guarantee that our sea will wash anything—clothes and all.

HIS DAUGHTER. The over-abundance of Hebrews—

RETIRED COLONEL. Why not? We guarantee that a week of our air will scatter compound arithmetic even out of the brains of a Jew.

HIS DAUGHTER. The—the multitude of young couples from the London suburbs.

RETIRED COLONEL. We welcome them heartily. We guarantee that the end of our pier is absolutely infallible

in bringing about engagements which terminate in thoroughly happy marriages.

HIS DAUGHTER (*a true soldier's daughter who never knows when she is beaten*). Yes, papa, quite, quite so. But you can't deny that the shrill voices of children constantly raised conduce to headache and discomfort.

RETIRED COLONEL. My dear, I do not deny it. Those children whose voices are shrill have just arrived here. We guarantee that a few hours of our ozone takes all the shrillness out, and renders them sweet, delicate, harmonious, and fit for the choir of a cathedral.

HIS DAUGHTER. And then the quaint old men and women who insist on exchanging domestic confidences on internal subjects through speaking tubes—

RETIRED COLONEL. I give you my word that after a week at the end of this pier their talk is of nothing but of the rows in the House, murders in Whitechapel, centuries by Ranji, and other bright topical matters. In fact we guarantee it.

HIS DAUGHTER. Then, too, it may be bad taste on my part, but I distinctly object to having my whole nervous system disorganised by the letting off suddenly of ear-piercing noises from the funnels of those detestable steamboats.

RETIRED COLONEL. Not from the funnels; but that

doesn't matter. Let me tell you, that we guarantee that a week of those sirens, taken as often as possible during the day from the end of our pier, will not only strengthen neurotic systems, but will, in most cases, do away with them altogether.

HIS DAUGHTER. Then, again—

RETIRED COLONEL. Good Gad! Again?

HIS DAUGHTER (*whose dictionary, like that of her father, does not contain the word capitulate*). And then, again, papa, those abominable penny-in-the-slot machines. It would really amuse me if even you could find some ingenious excuse for their ugliness, uselessness—

RETIRED COLONEL (*full of pluck*). My dear, nothing is easier. Those machines you see here and there about the end of our pier are the finest made. We guarantee—

HIS DAUGHTER. My dear father, you can't possibly guarantee that they really do test the lungs, heart and—er—so on; tell the weight, age, pecuniary position, and—

RETIRED COLONEL (*warmly*). Pardon me, my love. We not only *can*, but we positively *do*. Now, will you agree with me that this pier is the finest in the world?

HIS DAUGHTER (*who has fired her last round*). I—I

suppose I—(*suddenly*)—father, before I finally agree with you, tell me—

RETIRED COLONEL (*cheerfully*). Anything, my dear love, anything.

HIS DAUGHTER. Are you not a considerable shareholder in the company which runs this pier?

[There is a little pause. Three sirens shriek sardonically, dozens of children scream for joy, violins, harps, concertinas and cornets strive to drown each other with a determination worthy of a better cause, and the chorus of a refined, witty, and delicate music-hall song floats elegantly on the air :—

“ I got 'im, I got 'im,
I got 'im in the h'eye.
'E struggled, 'e muzzled,
'E wriggled, and 'e wiggled,
But I got 'im, I got 'im,
I got 'im in the h'eye.”

(All together with infinite joy)—

“ An' 'e's goin' ter be buried in the mornin'.”

HIS DAUGHTER. Well, papa?

RETIRED COLONEL. Hey, hah, hum, I—er—I don't fancy I asked you how you left your children, my love?

A COVENT GARDEN BALL

SCENE—*That ancient building off Long Acre in which, for a few belated weeks of each year, celebrated, enthusiastic, and determined singers endeavour, with superb pluck, to make themselves heard above the insular gabble of lovers of music.*

It is after the distribution of the usual prizes—the “silver-mounted mangle, suitable to a lady or gent about to enter the portals of Hymen”; the “solid silver-fitted gent’s umbrella, easily convertible into either a set of cigar-holders, a yard measure, or, with proper precautions, an ordinary protection against rain”; and the “lady’s handsomely, but not conspicuously, silver-mounted pocket Tantalus, with fancy padlock.”

Seated in a box on the O. P. side (whatever that may be), in the dress which mere moral people adopt for evening wear, is Jerry Blackith, Grenadier Guards. He also wears a look which poets describe as darkly, deeply beautifully blue, and his eye is the eye of a temporary abstainer. Standing at his side is his brother-in-

arms, "Piggy" Adame, a blue-eyed, round-checked, fair-haired boy, who is ingeniously got up to represent his notorious ancestor, who, as is well known, was content to spell his name without the final "e."

PIGGY (*cheerily*). Buck up, Jerry. It makes even me feel quite old and yellow to see you in this mood. Come on the stage with me, and I'll introduce you to La Belle Marie. She's guaranteed to remove any hump in a minute and a quarter. There she is, look—down there talking to Kruger, dressed in a pair of high-heeled shoes. Awfully smart kit, what?

JERRY (*dismally*). Babble on, babble on. If your heart had been broken, you wouldn't talk in that giddy way. It's jolly easy to see you've never been in love.

PIGGY (*with breezy scorn*). Never been in love! My dear, dear fellow, I should have died and been buried ages ago if I hadn't allowed my heart to be broken at least once a month ever since I loomed into view.

JERRY (*with the withering sarcasm of twenty-four summers*). You to talk of love—in that get-up! You to talk of love—with that baby face!

PIGGY (*waving his hand to La Belle Marie*). It's because of my baby face that my heart has been broken so often. You've evidently no notion as to

the value of that commodity. What did that poet chap say?—"A baby face hides a multitude of sins." And yet again, *I* only have to shave once a fortnight. But do come down. I'll get La Belle Marie to smile. It's better than a whole act of a comic opera.

JERRY (*with an Adelphi scowl*). Go away. I tell you, I'm too brittle to stand it.

PIGGY (*vastly amazed*). Too brittle? My dear Jerry, what *has* happened?

JERRY (*with a burst of what dear Mr Hall Caine would call "bitter laughter"—whatever that may be*). Oh, nothing. Only that the girl I love better than my l-life has b-broken off the engagement, that's all. Ha! ha!

PIGGY (*vastly relieved*). Oh, but that's nothing. They always do that, old man. It's a regular item in the programme. Take a holiday, and wait easily, airily, for a wire.

JERRY. You—you—you—

PIGGY (*picking it up quickly*). Exactly. I can imagine the rest. . . . Now, my dear Jerry, the fact of the matter is that the Lady Betty Beaujolais has found you out.

JERRY (*with natural nervousness*). What do you mean?

PIGGY. Found out that you're a bit of an artist,

that you've inherited in a marked degree your father's wonderful talent for painting in red.

JERRY (*with heroic dignity*). I suppose there is a market for your humour? The whole trouble, if you must know, is that she accused me—*me*, mark you—of flirting with her stepmother.

PIGGY. With her stepmother—never! Good Gad, Jerry, what appalling responsibilities we are obliged to put up with nowadays! If it wasn't for the show in Africa, about which our delightful Cabinet is taking it so doocid easy, I'd start a correspondence in one of the papers on "What shall we do with our parents?"

JERRY (*coldly*). I think perhaps it's time you went below. I notice that La Belle Marie is tapping the floor with her high-heeled shoe.

PIGGY (*looking down anxiously*). You're right. Bad sign. I'm off. But (*he turns at the door of box*) I'll get her, as a special favour, to smile up at you. Honestly, quinine isn't in it with her No. 3 smile.

[*Jerry is left alone. Falling into the stereotyped attitude of a Foxe's Martyr, he watches, with more interest than one would, if one hadn't been brought up in a family of martyrs, have considered consistent, the kaleidoscopic crowd on the stage—Krugers, Britannias, French fish-wives and fishy*

A COVENT GARDEN BALL

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French wives, gentlemen in khaki, German Emperors, Gaiety girls in and out of costume, bishops, Galateas, Hamlets, Swiss milk-sellers, and so ad infinitum.

LADY BETTY BEAUJOLAIS (*who, in mask and domino, is one of a party in an opposite box*). Oh, Joan, look, look!

MRS JACK HERRIES (*eagerly raising her glasses in the hope of seeing someone she ought not to look at*). Where, Betty, where?

BETTY. The box opposite. Oh, Joan, what a vixen I feel! "Iris" isn't in it with me.

MRS JACK (*disappointedly*). Why, my dear child, it's only Jerry Blackith.

BETTY. *Only* Jerry Blackith!

MRS JACK (*flippantly*). Only Jerry Blackith looking pretty much like an undertaker in a healthy time of year.

BETTY (*with a joy difficult to conceal*). Oh, Joan, how can you say such a horrid thing? Can't you see that, through me, the poor dear's heart is breaking?

MRS JACK (*who is, as you know, in the P.M. portion of her life*). Fiddlesticks! Heart breaking! The only thing that goes broke nowadays is one's husband.

BETTY (*rising, à la Joan of Arc, as shown to us by the*

biograph). Say nothing to prevent me, please. I'm going round to him. I cannot treat the human heart as though it were a new-laid egg for breakfast purposes. I shall go and slip my hand in his, beg him to forgive me, and—

MRS JACK. Quite fatal. Being in the wrong, the only wise thing to do is for you to forgive him.

BETTY. For being in the right?

MRS JACK. Exactly. He'll only bully you if you don't. . . . Certainly go round. But keep on your mask and domino, and alter your voice. If he flirts with you—taking you for—for an actress, your conscience won't prick you for having broken off the engagement for nothing. If he is really miserable and is rude, come back and I'll take you home. You can then write and tell him you forgive and forget, in the usual way of women who wish to be good wives.

BETTY (*trembling with excitement*). I'll do it. Yes, I will. But I daren't go alone. Do take me round, dear, dear Joan.

MRS JACK. Come, then. I'll leave you at the door of his box. Be very brassy, my dear. Try and behave like any of the—the females on the stage. It ought to be rather good fun.

[*They slip out of their box unnoticed.*]

JERRY (*quoting poetry to keep himself miserable*). "But what am I?" . . . That idiot Piggy! . . . "An infant" . . . fool, maniac! . . . "crying in the night" . . . dancing like a comic opera juvenile lead! . . . "An infant crying for the light, and with no language but a cry." . . . Come in.

BETTY (*entering very nervously, and trying to remember what "allurin'" women say in plays*). Er—I—I saw you! . . . I saw you, sitting there!

JERRY (*recognising Betty instantly and talking with beautifully simulated Grundyism*). Oh!

BETTY (*extremely pleased with his manner*). I've been looking at you for a long time, but I couldn't catch your eye.

JERRY (*absently*). Butterfingers! . . . I mean—oh!

BETTY (*more and more relieved and less and less nervous*). So I thought I'd come up and ask you to—to come down—don't you know.

JERRY. Oh!

BETTY (*quite surprised at the excellence of her memory*). You're Jerry Blackith, aren't you?

JERRY. Am I?

BETTY. I know *all* about you, you see.

JERRY. Do you?

BETTY. You were engaged to be married to Betty—the beautiful Betty Beaujolais, weren't you?

JERRY (*with a really excellent groan*). Was I?

BETTY (*delighted with it*). And she broke it off last night, didn't she?

JERRY. Did she?

BETTY. Because you had been flirting in the most disgraceful way with her stepmother, hadn't you?

JERRY (*emphatically*). No, I hadn't. If you are a friend of that—that person's, and she has told you this, she has told you—something which is not even on a nodding acquaintance with the truth. (*Sternly.*) Sit down, please. Now that you, an utter stranger to me—a person in whom, I assure you, I take no manner of interest—have thought fit to—to break in upon my misery and taunt me, I should like to say a few words to you about—about your friend.

BETTY (*charmed at his anger*). You dear! . . . I mean do. I shall be delighted.

JERRY (*with almost Princess's Theatre indignation*). Perhaps you don't know that this *friend* of yours, after having done her best, during the whole of the season, to catch me—

BETTY (*ablaze*). *Wh-at!*

JERRY. After having, as even the threepenny Society papers know, thrown herself at my head—

BETTY (*very seriously angry*). Mr Blackith!

JERRY (*thoroughly enjoying himself*). After having made me her slave for life by a judicious use of her unique dimples—

BETTY (*very seriously pleased*). Go on.

JERRY (*working himself to the tragic heights of a "Binks"*). After having led me to believe that she loved me to distraction by jumping at me when I asked her to marry me—

BETTY (*on fire again*). I beg your pardon. You jumped.

JERRY. She writes me a letter telling me that she never loved me, never wished to see or hear of me again, because somebody who is a friend of somebody else who is a friend of somebody else who is second cousin of somebody else who is best friend of somebody else who is *her* best friend (*he pants a little*) told her that I was carrying on a flirtation with her stepmother, a woman I would run ten miles uphill not to meet.

BETTY (*thinking it does sound a little thin*). And it isn't true?

JERRY (*scornfully*). True! However, why should I discuss it with you, an utter stranger. What's done cannot be underdone, as I daresay you've heard.

BETTY (*genuinely frightened*). Why not? How? What do you mean?

JERRY (*with the persiflage of a David Garrick*). Nothing, dear lady ; only that, from to-night, I am a changed man.

BETTY. W-w-what?

JERRY. From to-night I throw my stern morality to the four winds of heaven. From to-night all my cherished schemes of tuning the world's pitch to a higher, a loftier key dissolve into thin air. From to-night I fling away the anæmic staff of duty and seize the red paint brush of passionate, reckless, dare-devil youth. Come (*he catches Betty's hand*), let us to the dance !

BETTY (*flinging her arms round his neck*). Oh, Jerry, Jerry ; you mustn't, you mustn't !

JERRY (*pretending to stagger*). Betty ! You !

BETTY. I love you dearly, and I've been the most miserable woman in the world since I wrote that silly letter last night. Oh, don't—don't let me go down to my grave with the awful consciousness that I drove you to painting. I didn't mean a word. I only said it because—because—

JERRY (*extremely pleased at the unexpected turning of the tables*). Because ?

BETTY. Because, when I asked you not to squeeze my hand under the table at the Carlton, you said, "What's the good of anything ; why, nuffing," and I thought you were very, very rude.

JERRY (*sternly*). And so you put it down to your un-offending stepmother, who cannot help her looks? Who are you with here?

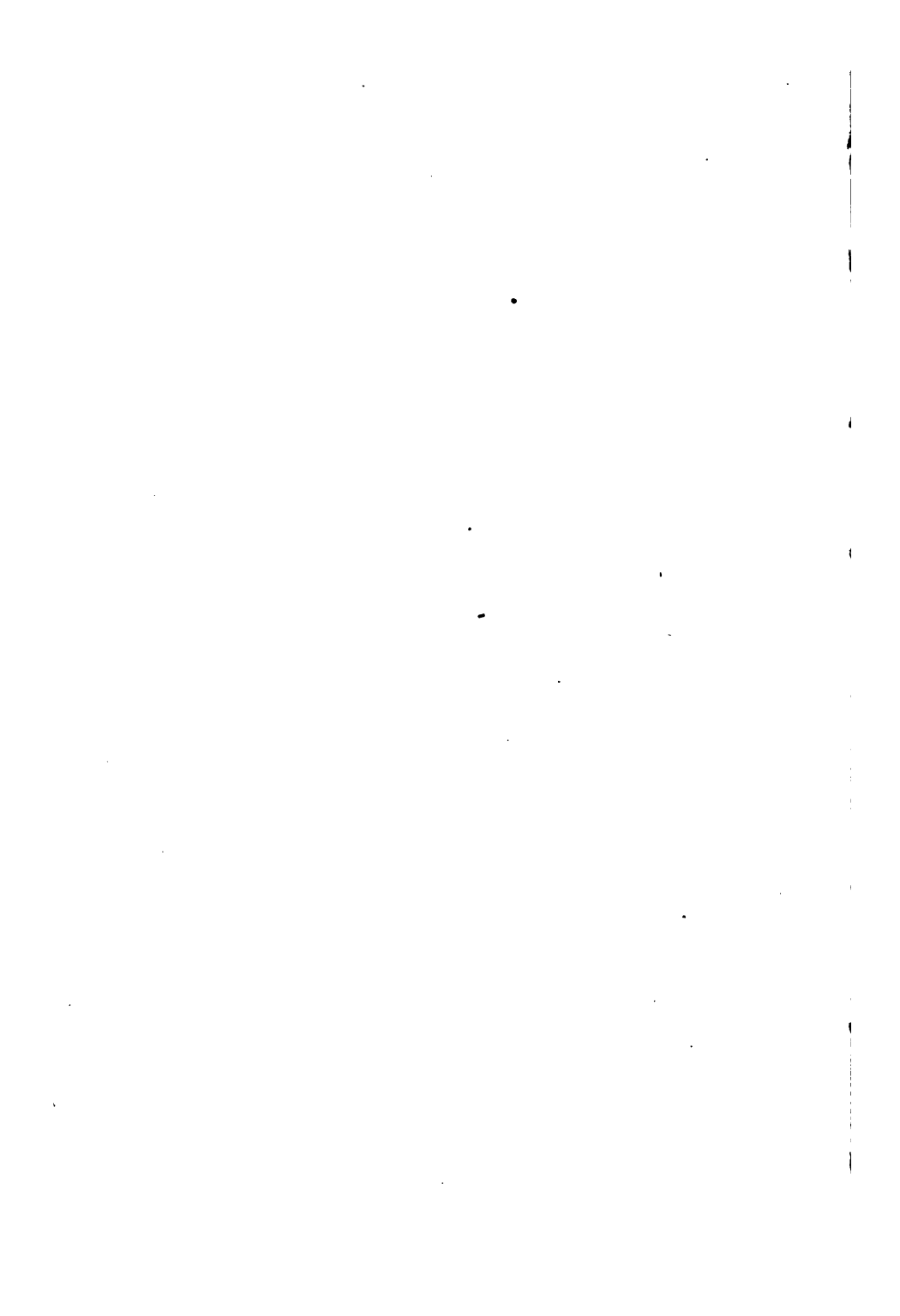
BETTY (*crying unrestrainedly*). Mrs Jack Herries's party, in the b-box opposite.

JERRY (*with superb dignity*). I will take you back to her.

BETTY. But do you f-forgive m-me?

JERRY (*following in the steps of Socrates for the first time in his life*). I will think it over and let you know by letter. In the meantime, if you would care, without prejudice, to take up our relationship where you broke it off—

[*With a quite un-English forgetfulness of her surroundings Betty promptly cuts off the remainder of his sentence in the usual pleasant manner.*]



THE HERALD ANGELS

A CHRISTMAS EVE DIALOGUE

SCENE—*The drawing-room of Mrs Harling's little house in Sloane Street on Christmas Eve.*

It is eleven o'clock. It is very quiet. A few cabs go by now and then, but there is silence between their coming and going. The fire crackles cheerily on the Dutch hearth, and on a little table between two ingenious armchairs in front of the fire there is an electric reading-lamp, closely shaded. The corners of the delicately-tinted room are in deep shadow, except when the fire sends out a shoot of light, which dies as soon as it is born. In the one armchair Lady Guyhirne is sitting asleep, but with her beautiful hands folded on her lap in an almost self-consciously graceful manner, and with her unique feet resting upon a bandy-legged footstool. The discreet light picks out her delightful though middle-aged profile with it, utterly irrepressible double chin, and the still beautiful

lines of her neck and shoulders. In the other chair, staring into the red depths of the fire, with her dainty chin in the hollows of her hands, sits pretty little Mrs Harling—large-eyed, with a slight quiver at the corners of her mouth and nostrils. There is a thin gold chain round her neck, which, going abruptly up to her left hand, holds a locket containing the portrait of the man who is her husband, the man from whom she has been separated for almost twelve months. Yet—not queerly, because she is a woman—she is pressing the photograph against her cheek.

LADY GUYHIRNE (*suddenly waking, with a gasp*). Dear me! It can't be ten minutes past eleven! It's absurd! It's impossible! Last time I looked at the clock, barely ten minutes ago, it was three minutes past ten, and I haven't been sleeping. I merely closed my eyes, because—well, just to keep them closed. However (*she yawns*), I don't think bed is such a bad place as some people say; do you, Milly, my dear?

MILLY HARLING (*to herself, pursuing her own line of thought*). What a fool I was—what a fool! Dear, dear, old Jim! If he'd only come back to me I'd go out of town for ever, pitch away all my swagger frocks, all my desire to be in the swing—

THE HERALD ANGELS

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LADY GUYHIRNE. Do *you*, Milly, my dear?

MILLY (*still inwardly*). If he'd only come back! I'm so—so lonely. I miss him so awfully much.

LADY GUYHIRNE (*rising and leaning over Milly's chair*). My dear, I've addressed a mild question to you on the subject of roostin' two distinct times with precisely the same emphasis. Let me give you a line to my man in Wimpole Street. Deafness is his special point.

MILLY (*trying to hide the locket in her hand and her discomfiture in a laugh*). I beg your pardon, dear aunt. I'm afraid I was dreaming.

LADY GUYHIRNE (*catching sight of the locket*). Is dreamin' quite the right word for it?

MILLY (*looking at her quickly*). What *do* you mean?

LADY GUYHIRNE (*airily*). Mean? My dear child, do I ever say anything with a meaning? People who say things with meanings use their brains; and people who are fools enough to use their brains get grey hairs and crow's-feet at thirty. I have been thirty for more years than even the Census people are aware of, yet I have no crow's-feet and not a single grey hair. Without any meaning in the remark, I think the right word is "regretting," not "dreaming." Night-night, my love; a merry Christmas to you. Hah, what's that?

RAW VOICES (*out of tune, some distance away*):—

“ . . . new-born King,
Peace on earth, and mer-cy mi-ild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye . . . ”

LADY GUYHIRNE. Dear things! I hope they won't catch cold!

[*She goes out humming the hymn with the remaining quarter of a very fine contralto.*]

MILLY (*returning to the fire and to her severed line of thought, and replacing the face of the portrait against her cheek*). A merry Christmas! . . . I am as likely to have a merry Christmas as the unfortunate wretches who will wander about the streets. I am less likely to have a merry Christmas than those bored men in the blockhouses on the veldt. At least *they* can yell their songs at the tops of their voices, in the dear old English way. I? . . . Oh, Jim, why *didn't* you smack me and send me to bed, like the naughty child I was? Why *did* you take me seriously when I said you bored me and I wanted the house to myself? Don't you know that women invariably mean exactly the opposite to the things they say? . . . Toch! it makes me angry to think that a great, whacking, strong,

handsome person like you should have been such an *idiot* as to have believed a single word of such an obvious—misstatement. As though any woman could be bored by you! . . . I was headachy. My frock was puckered on the hips; and every genuinely silly thing a woman does is done under the influence of puckers on the hips. Fancy your not knowing *that*, Jim, my dear—you, who know so much! Fancy your packing your things and leaving the house within half an hour without saying “Good-bye”! Why, twenty minutes before you left I’d forgotten the very words I used, the very existence of the foolish frock! And to stay away, sulking, without sending one line on a postcard to the stoopid little ijiot who l-loves you so much! Jim, oh, my Jim, how could you do it? how could you? . . . *You* think that I ought to have asked you to forgive me for having made such a beastly remark, and *I* think that *you* ought to ask me to forgive you for having taken it seriously. And there you get the whole thing in one little word—“pride,” with another word added—“beastly.” I suppose being miserable fills me with wisdom, for I now believe that it isn’t incompatibility of temper, difference in age, the lack of love, the want of money, that is the ruin of so many marriages. I believe it is just beastly pride, and nothing else. And yet,

knowing this, I can't, I won't, I *cannot* and I *will not* be the first to apologise. Why should I? Besides, I don't know where you are! Oh, but wouldn't I give my ears if you would get lonely and come back to me? Ears! Yes, and my diamonds, and my horses, *all* my friends, even—yes—even a year or—or nearly a year of my life! I would, I would, I would! . . . Jim, Jim, dar-ling! . . .

[She laughs, but her tears are falling upon the locket, which she now holds in both hands and is looking at very tenderly, very angrily, and in the manner of every woman who is a woman, ashamed of him, and of herself, miserable for his sake and for her own.]

RAW VOICES (*a little nearer, a little more raw*):—

“Born that man no more may die,
Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels . . .”

MILLY (*suddenly*). Goodness! What a state my nerves must be in! If I didn't know it were impossible, I could swear that I heard Jim's latchkey in the door and his funny, impatient stamp on the step! . . . Yes, more than that, that sharp click is exactly

the noise his stick used to make when he thrust it in that Chinese stand he hated so. . . . How—how absolutely childish! My heart's thumping like—like the dickens! Imagination, of course. I suppose I'm overwrought. I'll go and see that man in Wim-pole. . . . Pretty quickly, too! It seems to me his step is on the stairs, his hand is on the handle—

COLONEL HARLING (*entering quickly, with a brazen endeavour to disguise an all too palpable nervousness*). I beg your pardon for disturbing you. I believe I left my favourite copy of *Pendennis* here some months ago. If you'll allow me, I'll just—er—

MILLY (*clasping her hands tight and just suppressing a great cry of joy; speaking as she would speak to the man who takes twopence, which is twopence too much, for a seat in the Park*). Pray do. (*Inwardly.*) The darling! The darling! He's giving in, he's giving in!

HARLING (*picking the book up and opening it at random*). This is it. . . . Thank you. I trust my breaking into your house in this fashion—er— It's—it's pretty cold to-night.

MILLY (*zeroically*). Yes! (*Inwardly.*) The darling! The darling!

HARLING. I ought to have sent a boy messenger, of course, but I—I wanted the book in a hurry. And so

I— (*His voice tails off. He looks at her furtively, and there is a little silence.*)

RAW VOICES (*breaking it not unpleasantly*):—

“Hark! the herald angels sing,
Glory to the new . . .”

HARLING (*inwardly*). Lor', how dashed delightful she looks! It's hard luck that I get on her nerves so frightfully. We might have been so—

MILLY. I beg your pardon?

HARLING (*guiltily*). I beg your pardon. A slight cough.

MILLY. I beg your pardon. (*Inwardly.*) It was a sob. I swear it was a sob. Oh, my dear, how long *can* I hold out? I feel that, whatever happens, I shall be sobbing on your collar in five minutes from now.

HARLING (*not moving*). And now I will wish you—er— By the way, if you should want to send any message to me during the next few days, the Club will find me.

MILLY. Thanks. (*Inwardly*). Four minutes!

HARLING. It's—it's pretty cheerful at the Club just about now, I can tell you. Everybody's gone away to be jolly, and—the waiters and I have the rotten hole to ourselves. Er—one of 'em was fool enough to wish me a merry Christmas an hour ago, and I blacked his eye.

. . . Of course, I paid him for it ; but—are you—alone here ?

MILLY. Aunt Guyhirne only. (*Inwardly.*) Two minutes !

HARLING. Oh, yes. Nice woman. . . . Well, I suppose I'd better be—I say, you haven't altered anything here, what ? Looks just the same dear little home that I loved so much. . . . And there's that pair of slippers I left here by accident the night you—the night I—

MILLY (*hysterically*). Y-y-yes, s-s-silly things ! (*Inwardly.*) One minute and a half !

RAW VOICES (*on Harling's doorstep, loudly*) :—

“Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled.
Joyful, all ye . . .”

HARLING (*chokily*). I say, d'y' hear that ? Last Christmas Eve you and I were sitting—Milly ! Peace on earth—God and sinners—I've been so dashed miserable all this time away from you. . . . Couldn't you give a chap another trial ? What ? I—I should be so—so beastly 'bliged if you would. The Club—the waiters—

MILLY (*rising and leaning over the back of her chair in genuine amazement*). Do you mean to say you stayed

away all this time because you really believed you bored me? *Not* because you lost your temper, sulked, and wouldn't be the first to say you were sorry? Oh, Jim, Jim! (*She bursts into a passion of tears and a fit of laughter, knocks over the chair, and clasps her arms round her husband's neck.*) Jim, how *d-dared* you be such a fool? How *dared* you marry a woman knowing so little about the sex? . . . I never meant it. I've missed you so. My dear, I love you past all words. Darling, darling, darling!

HARLING (*hiding his face in her hair*). Middy—Middy, dardin', I—I—by dad, I—

RAW VOICES (*fortissimo*):—

“ Born to raise the sons of earth,
Born to give them second birth.
Hark! the herald angels . . . ’

THE POLICY OF "GAG"

It is hardly necessary to say where the scene is laid.

At anyrate, the Speaker, crushing back a difficult yawn, takes the chair at 3 o'clock.

The second reading of the London and District Hat-removing Bill having been formally moved.

MR. G-B--N BO-LES. I propose the rejection of this footling little Bill, on the ground that it is a purely personal matter, and one on which the House has no right to legislate. Why, good Heavens, very soon we shall be asked to regulate by legislation the number of times a man may use his handkerchief! There is an immense amount of work to be done, and I think the House cannot do better than quietly, and without any military honours, lay this silly little Bill to rest. Anyhow, law or no law, I frankly tell the House that I shall reserve the right to remove my hat to any lady friend, so there! (*Tired Ministerial laughter; farmyard noises from the Irish Benches.*)

SIR E. A-H-EAD B-R-LETT. Ah—I beg to oppose the amendment of my—ah—hon. friend, the member for—ah—somewhere or other. There may be, indeed there is—ah—an immense deal of public business to be—ah—done; but this Bill, slangily described as footling by my gallant and seafaring friend, is—ah—one of the most vital which has ever been before the House. To me, a man of the—ah—old school—*(loud Irish cheers)*—it is appalling to see the careless manner in which members of my—ah—sex greet members of the—ah—gentler sex in public thoroughfares. *(A Voice: "Which?" and prolonged general laughter.)* Being a man with a keen observant eye, I have watched with—ah—growing concern the tendency towards discourtesy which is becoming prevalent among the ordinary Englishman—*(loud ironical Irish cheers)*—and the extraordinary Irishman. *(Loud uproar, and cries of "Chuck him out," etc., as usual from Irish Benches. The Speaker's finger hovers over an electric bell, somewhat lately added to the arm of his chair, labelled "Police.")* I have even seen men greet their lady friends in the street, sir, not only *without* the removal of hats, but actually retaining in their mouths the common or garden briar. Oh, England, my England! *(Loud laughter from Irish members.)* Personally, however deeply engaged I may be in try-

ing to solve, by thought, the great problems of the moment, I never permit myself, on any account, to pass my cook, my housemaid, or my under-parlour-maid, or even my kitchen wench, without courteously raising my hat—slightly.

MR K - IR H - RDIE. I don't keep menials. (*Loud Irish cheers and faint English laughter.*) Besides, I never wear a hat. If I did, the whole point of my being in the House would be done away with. I refuse to waste the country's time by discussing such a matter. (*Loud Ministerial cheers.*)

Mr FL - VIN. Thin, sor, by refusing to make long speeches on the most trivial subjects, you help to make room for the urgent business of the country, and prove yourself a useless mimber of the Opposition and a traitor to the policy of "Gag." I shall speak on this matter, which doesn't interest me, for one hour and a half. (*He does. The Speaker and Ministerialists snatch a little welcome rest.*)

MR W. R - D - OND. Me frind and fellow-martyr being completely out of breath, Oi rise, sir, to continue the debate. For hundreds of years—indade evir since Oi romped as an innocent babe in me mither's arms among the shamrocks in me father's potato-field, Oirland . . . (*and so on as usual for forty-five minutes*).

MR HE-LY. I agree with my more or less hon. frind.
(*Loud uproar.*)

THE SPEAKER (*waking up*). Order, order !

MR HE-LY. I meant to have said, sir, I more or less agree with my most hon. frind, but such long hours spent in this House blocking the business of the country makes even the most unpatriotic member a little distrait. (*Loud Irish cheers and heartfelt Ministerial sighs.*) I say, Sir, I agree with my hon. frind and co-patriot in his remarks on the war which he let fly with such well-simulated enthusiasm and conviction in discussing this Hat-removing Bill, or whatever it is at all, and, as an Irishman of some years' standing I should like to add that, whatever may be said as to the removal of hats, there is little doubt but that the removal of guns from innocent farmers is a crime such as—

THE SPEAKER (*sternly*). Order, order ! I must ask the hon. member to keep to the subject before the House.

[*Loud and prolonged Irish cries of "Gag," and uproar, during which, to their evident delight, some eighteen of them are forcibly removed from the House by the police, while tired members, now quite accustomed to the scene, sleep as hard as they can. After an hour, the debate being resumed.*]

MR L-B--CHERE. Now that the curtain has rung down on our usual daily entertainment—I refer to the removal of furniture, as advertised, by pantechnicons in blue—I have a good deal to say on various subjects having nothing to do with the subject under discussion—whatever it may be. First, I wish to call the attention of the House to a most flagrant case of injustice. Last week, at Kettering, a magistrate imposed—

THE SPEAKER (*faintly*). The subject *still* before the House is the—er—Hat-removing Bill, sir.

MR L-B--CHERE. Sir, the case of injustice to which I am about to refer has to do with hat-removing. As I was about to say when you rudely interrupted me—(*loud and indignant cries of "Order!" and "Oh, oh!" and cheers from the remaining Irish*)—a magistrate imposed a fine of forty shillings upon an honest working man who, under the sedative influence of hops and other chemicals, forcibly removed the hat of a commercial traveller when the barmaid was singing "God Save Ireland." Now that—(*He goes on for an hour and a half, touching, with some humour, on the Jameson Raid, the Hawkesley Letters, the "Gold Brick Fraud," and the need for sending out Eau de Cologne and French pastry to the Boer prisoners.*)

MR B-LFOUR (*to Mr Ch--berlain*). Dear fellow,

can't we do anything? We shall be here again till the milkman comes, and I am *so* tired.

MR CH--BERLAIN. Questions are not reached yet. Of course this kind of thing cannot be allowed to continue. Presently, the country— (*They continue talking in whispers.*)

MR W-N-TON CH-R-HILL. I say, don't you fellows think you've had enough fun now? It's rather rot goin' on like this—eh, what? Do chuck foolin' about, and let us get on with the show. (*Quarter past eight strikes.*)

THE SPEAKER. Order, order! (*He rises and leaves the Chair, and the House empties for dinner. Progress—nil. Effect on the minds of foreigners—disgust.*)

RED TAPE

SCENE—*That block of dilapidated buildings, whose windows are permanently dirty, on the shady side of Pall Mall. A contemptuous sentry is, much against his will, standing at attention outside his pigeon-hole, or kennel. There is, otherwise, an air of blissful content and smug self-complacency about the place, very restful to the busy, over-wrought passers-by.*

LADY NORAH WYVENHOE (*hurries out of her carriage, passes up to the main entrance of the Office, ducks her head in order to preserve the shape of her hat, and enters. An official with a diplomatic mouth slowly materialises before her*). Oh, good morning. I—I—are you—are you—

OFFICIAL (*irreproachably*). I am, madam.

LADY NORAH (*clutching the tail of the composite animal she wears round her neck as though for support*). Oh, thank you. I've called to—to—

OFFICIAL (*raising a kind eyebrow*). To take tea with one of the Departmental heads, madam?

LADY NORAH. No, thank you very much. I've had tea. I—I wish to see someone in order to—to—

OFFICIAL (*discreetly dropping the eyebrow*). To ask a few questions ; yes, madam. This way, if you please. (*He conducts her gently through a series of quiet, dusty passages till he arrives at a door, on which he taps, insinuatingly opening it at the same time*). If you please, sir, a lady has called in order to ask you a few questions. Will you enter, if you please, madam ?

LADY NORAH (*entering nervously in time to see a smart person with a mathematically-correct centre parting fling a cigarette hastily into a corner—to die among the dust*). My name is Wyvenhoe, I—

SMART PERSON (*shooting a cuff and holding out a well-washed hand*). Ah, how de do ? Delighted. I'm sure. It's—ah, very changeable for the time of y'ar, don't you think ? Do sit down, won't you ?

LADY NORAH. No, thanks. I—I can't sit down.

SMART PERSON (*critically*). No, those kind of frocks make it a bit difficult, don't they ? H'erver, these cheers ain't s'comfy as all that goes. You ain't missin' anythin'. You want to know somethin', eh ?

LADY NORAH (*fighting down a blush*). Yes, please. I—I—rather do. I've got a—a—cousin—

SMART PERSON. Cousin ? Ha, yes ! I know.

LADY NORAH. Well—not exactly a cousin, but the cousin of a friend—

SMART PERSON. Ya-as. They all are.

LADY NORAH (*dashing on*). And he's been wounded, and I've not heard from him for three months, and I want to know where he is, and what he is doing, and where he was wounded, and—

SMART PERSON. Er—sorry, but er—it ain't in my Department. Let me trot you along to old Stickin-Themud. He's the head of the Sweetheart Department. Ha, ha! Don't mind me. I'm a bit of a wit, you know. Come along. (*He "trots" her along more quiet, dusty passages, finally opening a door on the left.*) Another sweetheart, old boy. (*Lady Norah totters in, twisting her composite "beastie" round and round her neck.*)

LADY NORAH. I—I—

SIR GRANBY STICKIN-THEMUD (*hastily pushing a tin of condensed milk behind a pile of calf-bound books*). Come in, my child. I don't know you, but I'm delighted to see you. Really, that black fox—is it a black fox, by the way?

LADY NORAH (*a touch of very natural indignation dispelling, for the moment, her emotion*). Certainly not! It's a silver fox.

SIR GRANBY STICKIN-THEMUD. Dear, dear, pray

pardon me. But these London fogs do so discolour silver. Sit down, sit down, young lady. Now, now, tell me about yourself.

LADY NORAH. Thank you, I can't sit down. I—I—the fact is, Sir Granby, he's wounded, and I—

SIR GRANBY (*rising reluctantly*) Wounded, wounded, you say? I greatly regret then that this charming *tête-à-tête* must come to an abrupt end. Wounds are not classed in my Department. But perhaps you are not in a hurry. (*Smiling with the blandness peculiar to this block of dilapidated buildings.*) Perhaps—

LADY NORAH (*edging towards the door*). Oh, I'm in a great hurry.

SIR GRANBY. Then I'm afraid I must conduct you to Room 21 B, where my friend, Sir Willmott Willocks, will perhaps be in a position to give you the assistance I am unfortunately prohibited from tendering. Follow me, dear young lady.

[*Opening the door with almost Turveydrop grace, he leads Lady Norah along further quiet, dusty passages. At last, arriving at a cul-de-sac, he opens a door on the right.*]

SIR GRANBY. I didn't quite catch your name, my dear young lady.

LADY NORAH. My name is Wyvenhoe—Norah Wyvenhoe.

SIR GRANBY (*seizing both her hands with almost avuncular affection*). The beautiful Lady Norah! Dear dear! I thought I knew the face.

[*He pushes the door wide, bows Lady Norah into the room, announces "Lady Norah Wyvenhoe," and withdraws.*]

SIR WILLMOTT WILLOCKS (*a breezy, large, hygienic person*). Splendid! Who'd have thought of seeing you here? You don't know me? You haven't the ghost of a notion that I'm an old friend of yours? Your father's a very old friend of mine, too. We've known each other intimately for years. He and I used to—How you've grown since I last saw you.

LADY NORAH (*twittering with nerves*). But my cousin is wounded and I—

SIR WILLMOTT. Ah! Is your—cousin in the Regulars or the Yeomanry?

LADY NORAH (*agitatedly*). Ye—Yeomanry.

SIR WILLMOTT. Afraid I can't give you any information. This is the Wound Department for Regulars only. But I have a sort of a notion that we *do* deal

with the Yeomanry somewhere. I fancy young Mr Gastonbury, who has just entered the office, looks after that Department. But don't hurry away. Let me make you some tea.

LADY NORAH. No tea, thank you very much. Please, please take me to Mr Gastonbury. My cousin—er, my cousin—er—

SIR WILLMOTT. Ah, to be sure, yes. Business before pleasure. This way, then ; this way.

[Again she is conducted forth. She is led back along the passages, the same dusty passages, round a hitherto unexplored corner.]

SIR WILLMOTT (*flinging back a door*). Mr Gastonbury my friend, Lady Norah Wyvenhoe, wishes for some information from you— *Good-bye*. Give my love to the Marquis.

MR GASTONBURY (*brusquely—he is new to the office*). Yes? What is it, please?

LADY NORAH. My cousin — in the Yeomanry—is wounded, and I—

MR GASTONBURY (*without looking up from his foolscap*). I'm sorry. Wounds are not in this Department. We deal with deaths. Mr Millikin, fourth door on the left as you turn to the right, maybe—

[*With a cry of desperation, Lady Norah, like so many others in the past, turns and flies out of the Red Tape building, past the Diplomatic Official, who wears a smile of infinite pity, into the arms of a District Messenger Boy.*]

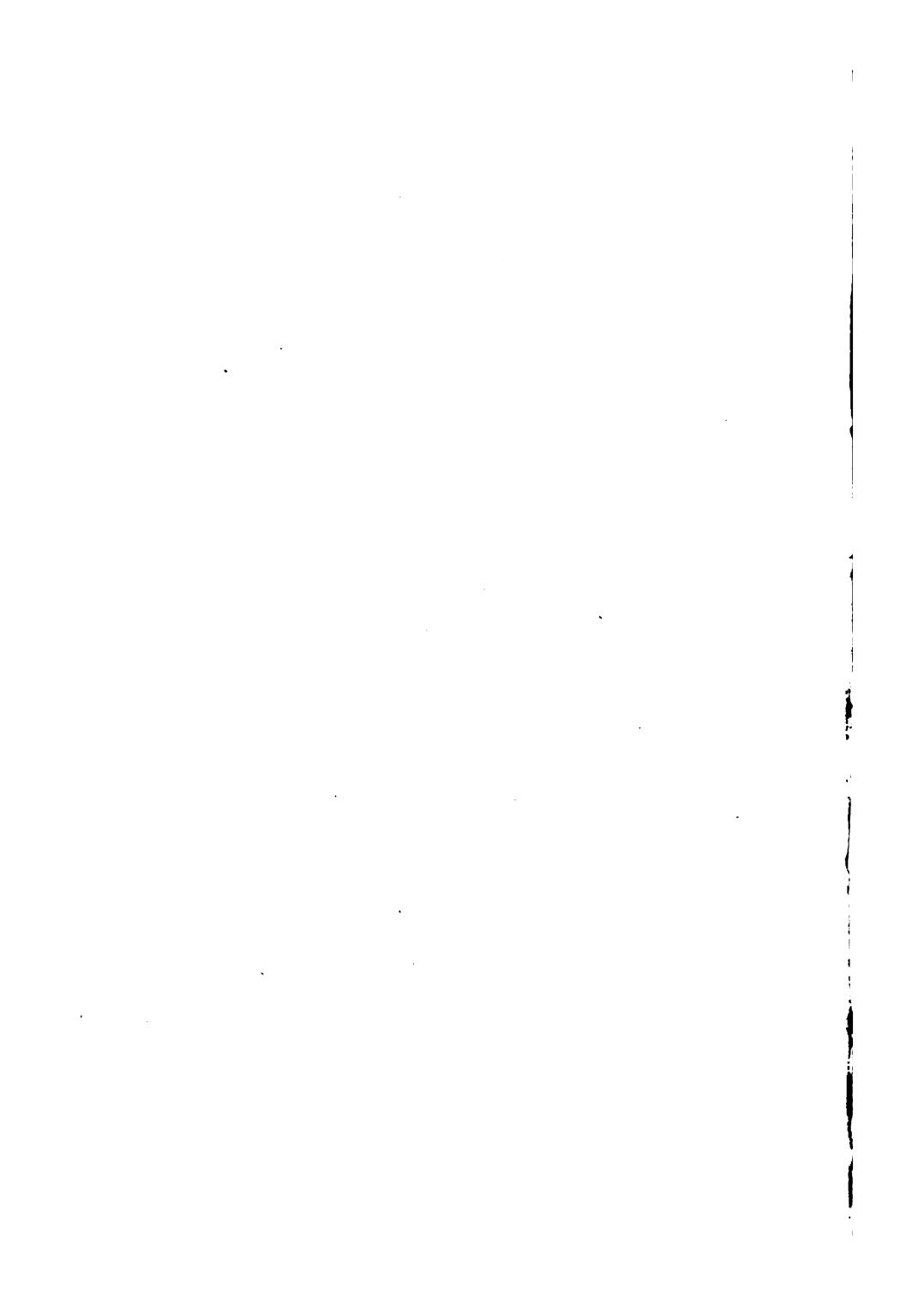
LADY NORAH (*clutching the boy's arm*). You don't belong to this office, therefore you will be able to tell me the latest news of the wounded.

BOY (*stolidly*). Oh, Lor', yuss'm. Wot nime and wot ridgement?

LADY NORAH. Captain Ronald Alexander Trevor, of—

BOY. Of Paget's 'Orse? Slight touch of henteric ten weeks ago, 'orspital for a fortnight, rejined 'is ridgement two diys ago has fit has a flea.

[*Lady Norah pours largesse into the boy's indifferent hands, and bursts into relieved tears.*]



PEOPLE PASSING

SCENE—*You are standing at Piccadilly Circus with me on a Wednesday afternoon at 5.25.*

YOU (*in your usual bright, interesting manner*). She had every other Sunday evening off, and no one could have been kinder to her, that I'm certain. I made no objection to the constant whiffs of shag which reached me from the kitchen—

TALL PERSON (*with the face of a fox and the voice of a stone-chat*). Look here, do you or don't you? I don't care tuppence whether you do or you don't, all I want you to do is to make up your mind. Being a woman, of course you find it difficult, but—

INFINITESIMAL FEMALE (*with the gestures of a performing canary, and an umbrella with a cupid's head*). Well, I can't help it. I may be foolhardy. I may even be improvident. But I liked it. I did indeed. The only thing in the play I did object to was the haddock! You know, dear Hypathia, if there is one place in London where one does not expect to be obliged to hold one's nose, it's the St James's. Really—

UNDERSIZED MALE ADULT (*pinched, pale and pepsined*).

My dear feller, you're an author. Nobody expects you to have an income. You're all right. But take me. Now, I've served thirty years in a Government Office, and my salary is now two hundred a year. That extra tuppence means that I must take a smaller house, do without tobacco, give up my A.B.C. and go to Lockhart's—

YOU (*finding me again*). As I was saying, dear Mr Hamilton, I made no complaints about the shag, and, knowing how quite too difficult it would be to get so presentable a maid again, I even went so far as to buy her two dress circle seats for some theatre once a week, give her the run of my piano, let her use my ticket at Mudie's, ask her friends to smoking concerts in the drawing-room on the third Friday of every month—

MUCH-WAXED WARRIOR (*in white spats and a rage*). What? What's that? I said, just about as plainly as I knew how, and that's as plain as a pikestaff—though why the dooce a pikestaff should be plain beats me—that the Army honours are a screaming, yelling farce. Just fancy givin' a K.C.B. to that absolutely incompetent idiot, General—

BRIGHT BOY (*rising eighteen, with microbe tie*). Rippin', from head to foot. Bubbling over with fun, as slippery as my allowance, with a jolly sight more stay in her.

Not a beauty, don't y'know, but when she comes on in the last act—the Blow-black-in-face act I call it—got up like a hussar, I thought I'd never seen such a *dream*.

LONG-HAIRED PERSON (*velvet coat, flyaway tie, and all the other signs of genius*). No, the beggars will *not* hang me. And for years I've done my best to get 'em to. To be hung has been my one ambition in life. To you, who don't care a straw for mounting higher than you are, who are content to remain among the ruck on *terra firma*, my despair, my chagrin, my umbrage, may seem futile, childish. But I swear to you that I should become ten years younger in a second if only I could be hung—

YOU (*again finding me: still charming*). No, I'm wrong there. It wasn't the third Friday, it was the second Tuesday, and I can't tell you, I couldn't even had I the Browningsque flow of the picturesque, the appalling effect those concerts had upon my drawing-room. I had always treated policemen's feet to a grain of salt; but really, in the morning, when I looked at the indentations in the silk cushions—

NONDESCRIPT INDIVIDUAL (*with a bilious overcoat and indigestible dump hat*). End of the session, I should think. I can't tell you to a day. I had it from a man who had it from another man, whose brother-in-law is a

cousin of the wife of a private member, and therefore, when I say that I am *certain* that the Government is tottering to its—

FLUFFY FEMALE (*of uncertain age and a positive manner*). I don't mind if anybody does catch us. After all, we're engaged to be married. However, whether you like it or not, I decline to go another inch until you blow this smut off my cheekbone—

YOU (*with your indomitable pluck*). But when she became filled with patriotism, and I found her practising the revolver at the pictures, I gave her a month's wages and packed her off.

ME (*at last*). Really! And now, I suppose, she'll take a theatre and run a romantic costume play, as all the others have done, etc. But this is your 'bus. Good-bye. So glad you—

BOBBY (*as usual*). 'Igher up there, 'ammer. This ain't the hour for puttin' your 'bus to bed, you—

[*You nod and smile from the inside of the offender, and I turn away with a sigh—of relief.*]

THE GLAMOUR OF THE PRIMEVAL

SCENE—*The Curries' cottage in the country. No railway station within five miles, no village within three.*

Major Bill Currie and his wife have just arrived from town for a lengthy stay. Their luggage blocks the miniature hall and chokes up the doll's-house drawing-room. The sound of the wheels of the dilapidated fly which brought them from the station is dying away in the distance.

Major Bill Currie, with a well-filled pipe in his mouth, is hunting, with a puzzled expression, for matches on the mantelpiece. Mrs Bill Currie, seated on a huge dress-basket, is watching him with a look in which there is amusement, affection, excitement and a great resolve. After a protracted and useless search the Major murmurs an appropriate line of a barrack-room ballad, and rings the bell with a firmness of touch which tells of a long residence in India. Mrs Bill's look of amusement, affection and excitement fades out of her beautiful grey eyes. The great resolve reigns alone.

BILL (*after whistling "The Road to Mandalay" twice through from the beginning*). I say, little 'un?

MRS BILL. Say away, Bill, darling.

BILL. This is a most extraordinary go!

MRS BILL. What's a most extraordinary go?

BILL (*with growing volubility*). Why, this. That bell rang till its tongue nearly fell out of its head. And I've whistled the "Mandalay" bang through twice—symphony, grand finale, and all—since. Now, why in the name of all that's dusky doesn't someone come? Brown and the three women started three trains before ours. They have had time to get everything laid out and in full working order by now. And yet nobody came to open the door, nobody fetched in the luggage, and nobody has appeared to cart it upstairs. Little 'un, all I can say is that it's a most extraordinary go!

MRS BILL (*rising with the air of a Joan of Arc*). Bill, it means that the moment has arrived.

BILL (*gazing down at her in astonishment*). Moment? What moment?

MRS BILL (*rosy with excitement*). The moment. Listen. For a long time—ever since, in fact, I tumbled on a copy of *Paul and Virginia*, six weeks ago—the glamour of the—the primeval has become stronger and stronger upon me.

BILL. The glamour of the *what*?

MRS BILL (*blushing with pride*). The primeval. The desire to be simple, rustic, natural, unhampered by convention, to become a worker—the great longing to throw aside luxuries, to milk my own cow, make my own bed, cook my own dinner—has gradually taken possession of me.

BILL (*breathless*). Well?

MRS BILL. Gradually and gradually the regular routine of town life has got upon my nerves. To be waited upon hand and foot by a pampered menial, to raise my finger and find my slightest whim gratified, has made me pine and ache to break away and be free.

BILL (*anxious for the matches*). And so—

MRS BILL. And so, Bill, when you proposed coming down here for a time I saw my chance of becoming, in very truth, Virginia to your Paul—

BILL (*blankly*). Paul who?

MRS BILL (*sailing on*). Venus to your Adonis—

BILL. You packed no . . . ?

MRS BILL. And, in order that we might emulate those sweet, simple people and do everything for ourselves, I told the servants not to come.

BILL (*with a Gargantuan roar*). What!

MRS BILL (*flinging her excited arms round the big man's neck*). Bill, darling Bill, don't be angry and spoil everything. Let me have my own way for once. Think what

fun we can have. You cleaning the boots while I'm cooking the eggs; you dusting the drawing-room while I'm making the bed; you washing the plates while I'm ordering the dinner; you peeling the potatoes while I'm playing you "Sleepless Nights" on the piano; you watching the kettle boil while I'm reading Browning aloud. Think of the Art and Culture we can combine with Hygienics and Self-help! . . . Are you thinking?

BILL (*with a queer look in his eye*). Like Barnaby Rudge's raven.

MRS BILL. Well, well, don't you like the idea? Aren't you glad I didn't bring the servants? Don't you think I'm a perfect wonder for one of so few inches?

BILL. But how long will it all last?

MRS BILL (*with the enthusiasm of a female under thirty*). For ever, so far as I'm concerned. Oh, Bill, you don't know, you can't *think* how glad I shall be never to be obliged to dress, never to be obliged to wear the polite smile of perpetual inanity. Oh, to be able to get up with the light, and, if I like, go to bed with it! Oh, to be away from callers, from those hideous long dinners where I overeat myself, those everlasting problem plays, that high-strung female novel, that bi-hourly effervescing medicine! Oh, Bill, perhaps after a time, when we have forgotten the noise of the never-ending hansom, the

raucous shout of the fibbing paper boy, we may throw off every horrid convention and become primeval, pre-historic!

BILL (*whose idea of pre-history comes from Punch*). You mean, take to the sheepskin and the branch of a tree? Splendid, nothing I should like more. You'd look very well in that kit.

MRS BILL (*dancing with pride*). Should I, Bill; oh, should I really? You are a duck to enter so heartily into the spirit of the thing. Shall we begin now?

BILL. Ain't it just a leetle chilly this afternoon?

MRS BILL. I mean, shall we begin to *do* things?

BILL (*who has formulated his plan of action*). Rather, little 'un, and I'll tell you what. You trot along and make the kitchen fire while I cart up the luggage. You'll find the coal in the shed, I expect—don't pay any attention to beetles and mice—and very likely you'll have to chop the wood; but you'll enjoy that fun, because Virginia did it. So did Venus; she always chopped her own wood. Then, after that, while I look for the matches, you can go and see that the bed is properly aired. Venus was awfully particular on that point, don't you know; and then you can take out all the cans and jugs and fill them at the well. That was always Virginia's job, I'm told. Then you can put on a pair of my golf boots and go and milk the cow for tea,

while I get the slices of bread ready for the toast. Then, after that, I'll bunk across the fields to the village and bring back a leg of mutton for you to roast. I don't fancy Venus was much of a cook, but I'm perfectly certain Virginia was a ripper. Then, while I'm shaving, you can be serving up the dinner, laying the table, and trimming the lamps; and while I'm eating it you can be putting the dressing-room tidy, pitching away my shaving water, cleaning my brush, and fixing up my razors. Venus never let Adonis fix up his razors. Then I'll read the papers while you get a bit of dinner in the kitchen; and, that done, I'll stroll out and see the weather while you wash up the things. How does that meet your views? Don't you think I'm a Paul and Virginia rolled into one by the enthusiastic way I leap into your ideals?

MRS BILL. B-but, Bill, darling, where do you come in? You see, I've never made a kitchen fire in my life, and I'm afraid I shall certainly catch lockjaw if I chop the wood.

BILL (*with beautiful gravity*). Still, it is *so* primeval to chop! They all did it, don't you know.

MRS BILL. I know, but I thought perhaps you— And then, Billy, I never could make a kettle boil, never. I don't know how to tell whether a bed is aired or not, and how *do* I milk a cow?

BILL. But if you don't do all these things, where does self-help come in?

MRS BILL. Well, you see, Bill, darling, I thought perhaps you— Besides, roasting a leg of mutton before a roaring fire will play the very dickens with my complexion, and my nails will be quite ruined if I trim the lamps.

BILL. Oh, but Virginia didn't mind her nails, and Venus cared no more for her complexion than she did for the cut of her bodice.

MRS BILL. And won't you find it very dull eating your dinner all alone? And you know I never could bear the sight of a razor. It sets my teeth on edge. And, oh, Bill, I'm sure if I wash up the dinner things my hands will be covered with chaps.

BILL (*with tender gravity*). But, my dear little girl, you must remember that Venus didn't mind how many chaps she had. Of course, you'll find servant's work a trifle irksome and *infra dig.* for the first six months.

MRS BILL. Six months!

BILL. But that won't matter if you know you're being primeval. And when your nails are all broken—

MRS BILL (*agonised*). All broken?

BILL. And your complexion is like a muddy pool—

MRS BILL. Muddy p-pool?

BILL. You'll be able to look at yourself in the glass and say, "I'm a strong-minded little woman, I am, living up to a theory, and having a real good time in consequence." And after a year or two you'll tumble out of bed at five in the morning as though you'd been born to the game. The continual exercise of pumping will take all that conventional plumpness and smoothness away from your arms, and they'll be as brawny and as tough as a policeman's or a lamplighter's; and the continual scrubbing of floors and doorsteps will turn your ridiculously tender little hands into great, hard, cracked, red, charwoman's fists. There! Think of the jolly primevality of that. Think of the good old pre-historicity of that. . . . *Are you thinking?*

MRS BILL (*a faint glimmer of smile appearing through a mist of tears*). Y-y-yes, Bill, darling, like Barnaby Rudge's raven.

BILL (*turning away to hide a broad grin*). Good. Then that's settled. Now you go and begin on the kitchen fire, while I trot over to the village.

MRS BILL. Yes, but, Bill, darling—

BILL. Well, little 'un?

MRS BILL (*holding down her head*). Do you think there will be a telegraph office in the village?

BILL. Sure to be. Why? Have you forgotten to bring down any aprons and tea-cloths?

MRS BILL. (*appealingly*). Yes, Billy.

BILL (*breezily*). Then I'll wire for some. Buck up, little 'un, or the fire will never be lighted by the time I come back.

[*Whistling the "Road to Mandalay," Bill saunters out into the garden.*]

MRS BILL (*watching him with a growing desire to burst out crying*). Bill!

BILL (*turning—without the smile*). Hullo!

MRS BILL. Come here, Bill, darling.

BILL. Coming, little 'un.

MRS BILL (*putting both arms round the big man's neck, and hiding her head in his waistcoat*). Bill, I'm a little afraid the glamour isn't so strong upon me as I thought it was. Do you know what I think we'd better do?

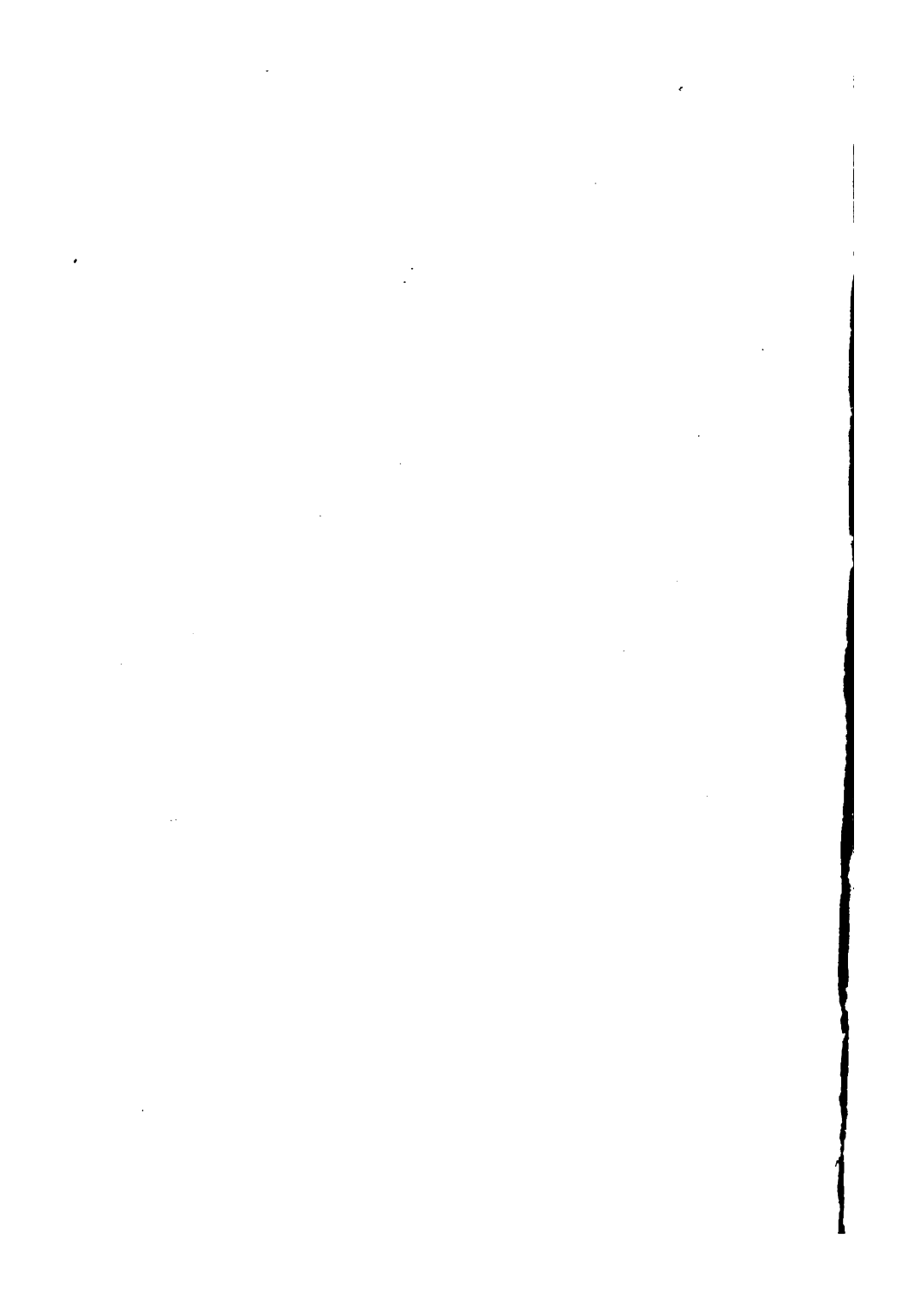
BILL (*with superb self-control*). No, little 'un, what?

MRS BILL. Why, I think we'd better wait until the glamour is a bit stronger before we actually try primevalities. Do you see? And, in the meantime, don't you think it might be a good idea to wire for Brown and the three women?

BILL. Yes, darling, one of the best ideas in the world.

MRS BILL. But mind, Bill, I'm going to be primeval some day—you see if I'm not.

[*Bill is still waiting.*]



THE SENTIMENTALIST AND THE EXPERT

SCENE—*Drumbittie Castle, N.B., which the Willie Drattitts have again rented from the Earl of MacWorried for the shoot.*

It is after dinner. Nearly everyone is in the drawing-room, standing round the piano at which the beautiful Eve Orriss is seated, singing the latest Weatherley-Molloy concoction, in which, it is hardly necessary to say, "Ah, said the angel," and "the firelight glow," occur the usual number of times among the four quavers in the bar of an exceedingly common-time air peculiar to this country since the arrival of these two estimable and no doubt genial gentlemen.

In the doorway of the card-room, which opens into the drawing-room, Captain Frank Yatton is standing with Lord Abercanaid. Behind them three almost ridiculously disinterested servants are getting the card-tables ready.

ABERCANAID (*standing with his little bandy legs wide apart, a smile of pity on his strangely ugly face*). By Jove! my dear Yatton, how excited and pleased you make me feel.

YATTON (*looking down at Abercanaid with intense surprise*). I? Why, what have I done?

ABERCANAID. It ain't what you've done, my dear, big, handsome person, it's what you've said. From the charmin' conversation we've just had together I find—and the discovery makes me quite thirsty—that there is something new under the sun, after all said and done.

YATTON. Yes; well, what is it?

ABERCANAID (*chuckling*). It ain't an it—it's a he. As a matter of fact, it's you—you, yourself.

YATTON. Me! Good Lor'! (*He looks quite uncomfortable.*) Bless your heart, my good chap, there's nothing new about me.

ABERCANAID. Oh, ho! and he don't even know it. He's unconscious! Oh, better and better. Why, my big-fisted Apollo, you're—you're quite pristine. I never felt so happy in my life. I feel like Nansen or Columbus. I've discovered a man who believes in women, a man who believes in love, a man who thinks that women are capable of sacrificing their prospects to that will-o'-the-wisp, that myth, that creation which exists

only in the imagination of the nursery governess—Cupid. Good gad! how—how dashed, how—how perfectly damn'd exciting. My dear, dear Yatton, but I congratulate you with all my heart.

YATTON (*looking down at Abercanaid with much the same indulgent expression employed by a St Bernard towards a persistent toy terrier*). You rum little joker! Anybody who didn't know you to be an inveterate coddist would believe you were in earnest.

ABERCANAID (*standing eagerly on tiptoe and catching hold of Yatton's shirt-stud*). In earnest? But I am in earnest. I tell you I've made a magnificent discovery. In the twentieth century, to find a man of the world, a dashed good-looking man of the world, nearer thirty-two than thirty, who's travelled, and lived, and knocked about, who still believes a woman is capable of loving a man—and marrying a man—for himself! It's good enough to read a paper on the subject to the Royal Society. I thought you were extinct. I thought you went out about the middle of that full-blooded reign of Henry VIII. of pious memory. I thought you existed merely in the pages of books by Manx Methodists and the female purveyors of blood, thunder, honey, vinegar and dripping to the half-penny million. I thought you were the sole property of retired army captains turned playwrights and young gentlemen with eyes to the main

chance, who wrapped you up in silver paper, labelled you "Dick," or "Kit," or "Arthur," filled your pockets with sugar-candy and your eyes with tears, and sent you in front of the footlights in *Seconds in Command, Sweet and Twentys*, and *When we were Twenty-ones*. Let me pinch you to satisfy myself that you are not in manuscript. It's—it's ever so dashed jolly, by Jove!

YATTON (*with an uneasy laugh*). Funny little man!

ABERCANAID (*getting even more excited*). Now look here, Yatton; having found you, I should dearly like to show you what a dashed idiot you are to hold the beliefs you do.

YATTON. You couldn't, old man.

ABERCANAID. However, I should like to try. There's no knowing. Perhaps, after the long runs of unadulterated dashed nonsense at the theatres, the world has become affected, and you're right to believe in love for love's sake, and that kind of thing. We'll put it to the test.

YATTON. How are you going to do that?

ABERCANAID. Nothing simpler. Here am I, the hideous, repulsive, bandy-legged, five-foot-on-a-brick-cynic, but an earl with, strangely enough, more money than I can count. Here are you, the handsome, dashing, good-natured optimist, but without a shilling to rattle in your pocket; and yonder is Eve Orriss, an

extremely beautiful, young, nicely-bred girl, who, as we can hear, is able to give infinite expression to tuneless rot.

YATTON (*involuntarily*). Eve, the dearest the sweetest—

ABERCANAID. Oh, tell me quickly. Are you, by any chance, in love with Eve?

YATTON (*defiantly*). Yes, I am. Why?

ABERCANAID. And is she, by any chance, in love with you?

YATTON. How do I know? I've never asked her.

ABERCANAID. But *is* she, do you think? Do you feel pretty confident about it when you do ask her?

YATTON. I—I—she has always been very good to me, so far.

ABERCANAID. In fact, yes, you think she is in love with you, and will accept you when you propose; although you haven't got enough money to keep her in hairpins. Simply excellent. Now, if my ideas, my experience of women, are worth anything at all, she won't accept you.

YATTON. What?

ABERCANAID. What's more, she will accept me.

YATTON. Accept you? Absurd!

ABERCANAID. Absurd, you think, because I'm such a hideous little wretch? Ah, but then you see all

women like being peeresses with more money than they know how to spend.

YATTON (*whose blood is up*). I'll bet you a thousand pounds to a rotten orange—

ABERCANAID. No, don't. First of all, you couldn't pay if you lost; and, secondly, I haven't got a rotten orange if you won.

YATTON (*laughing excitedly*). Very well, I won't bet. The thing is so—so absolutely absurd. Accept you, when she loves me—simply because you're a peer with money?

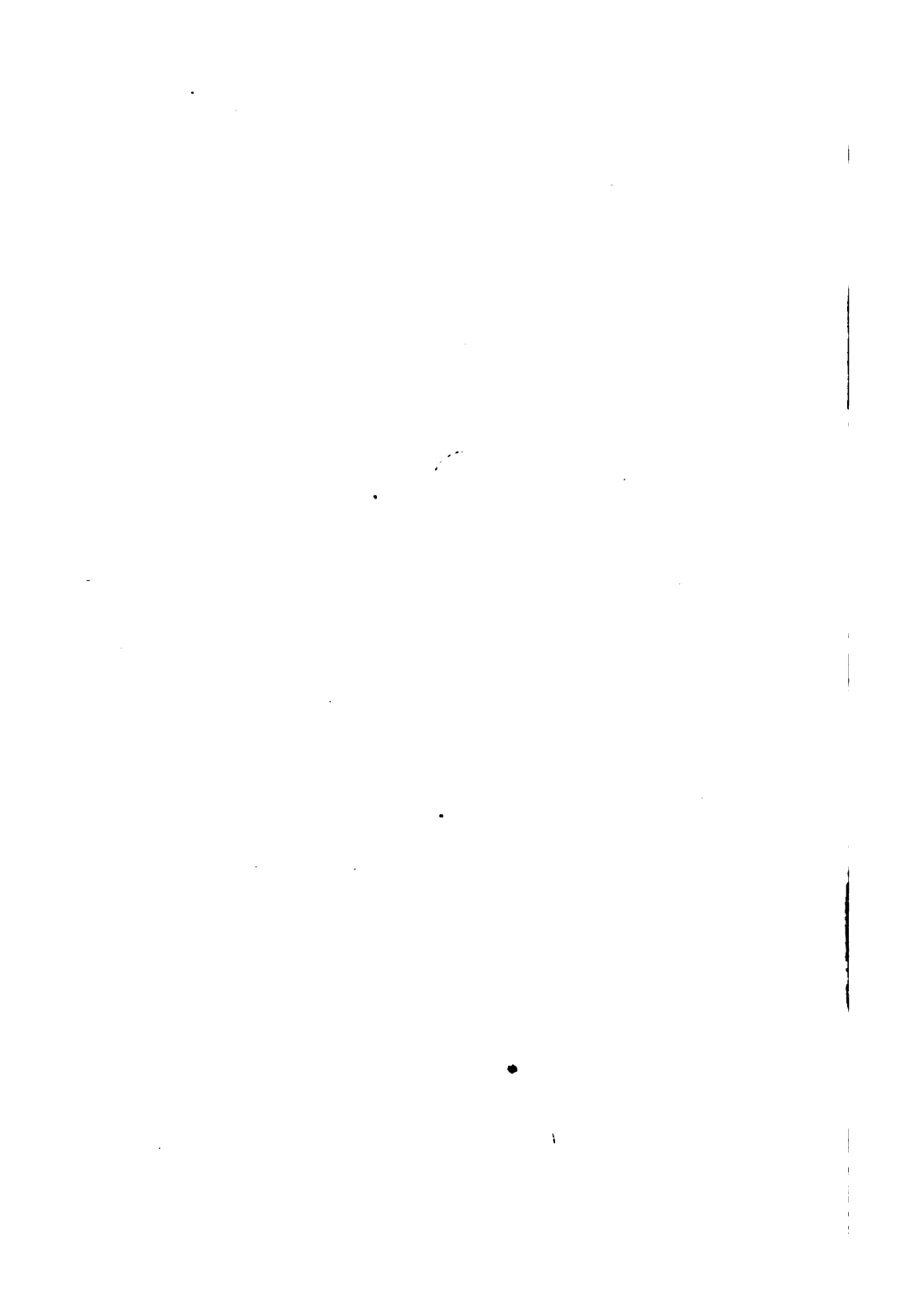
ABERCANAID. Certainly. I hold, after having lived forty-one rather crowded years, that any woman would.

YATTON. All right, then. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you go and propose to her before I do. There!

ABERCANAID. Good, and if she refuses me and accepts you, I shall be dashed astonished, and believe, after all, that there is such a thing as a woman who is capable of true love. If she accepts me—why, I shall simply stand where I stood before, except that I shall be tied to a woman I don't care tuppence about and who will look upon me with disgust, in the usual Society way. . . . Look! She's moved away from the piano and is standing alone by the fireplace, trying to get a look at herself in the glass. Wait here. I'm off. If she accepts me I'll tuck both my thumbs into my

waistcoat and dangle my fingers, and then you can cry out, "I don't believe it, I don't believe it! She cannot be false. I shall go ma-ad," like they do in those plays I told you about, and I shall take her out into the conservatory to find out how soon she would like to lead me to the stocks. Ta-ta, old man. Keep your eye on me.

[With elbows out, the quite hideous little person crosses the room to Eve's side. Yatton, with an amused, indulgent smile, watches. About a minute later, in the ordinary course of nature, Abercanaid's thumbs go up and his fingers waggle. The happy pair, so delightfully ill-assorted, wander into the conservatory, and Yatton, like the tearful gentlemen at the Comedy, the Haymarket and the Vaudeville, chokes back a great sob, crying, "I don't believe it; I don't believe it. She cannot be false! I shall go ma-ad," just as they all do who haven't taken the trouble to know their world.]



HOW TO WRITE A SOCIETY NOVEL

Take a writing-block, a bottle of violet ink in which there is a touch of vinegar, and, having procured all the cushions you can, find a comfortable sofa, lie down, and think of a snappy title. You decide upon The Eleventh Commandment, as appealing especially to women, and then, quite calmly, quite gracefully, you plunge at once into your first chapter. Let the scene be laid in a bedroom—they are popular and quite essential when you are dealing with Society. Describe, without any regard to style or grammar, the usual red glow playing across the old-established velvet pile from the great fire of proverbial logs. Talk brightly of the familiar sofa drawn up between the fire and the inevitable four-poster bed ; and, as you draw near the end of your tenth chapter, gather yourself together and let go all the wealth of your English upon a five-thousand-word description of the robe de nuit worn by your heroine, Lady Jane This or That, who is reposing on the sofa, gazing with violet eyes into the

golden glow. *In the last lines of the chapter you will briefly state that, seated in an armchair on the right-hand side of the fire, clothed in an excuse, having just returned from a ball, is your heroine's mother, the Marchioness of whatever you choose to call her. Give a big exclamation mark after her name, and begin your eleventh chapter as follows :—*

THE MARCHIONESS (*lighting another cigarette; don't forget to see that she drops her final g's*). Now, Jane, old man, hurry along with your little yarn. I'm dog-tired, and, goodness knows, I don't want everybody to think in church to-morrow that your mash is marryin' my granddaughter.

THE HEROINE (*shuddering convulsively*). My yarn, as you pink-'un-ishly call it, mother, is simply this. I—I (*always let them say I twice on occasions of this kind*) am not at all sure (*four or five dots here look well and mean nothing*) that there will be (*dots*) a wedding (*more dots to-morrow*).

THE MARCHIONESS (*with a gasp, almost of despair*). My hat! Jane, what tommy-rot is this?

THE HEROINE (*whose violet eyes must be filled with a nameless fright*). Mother, listen. To-night, while Minchin (*always call the maids by their surnames; it will prove to book-reviewers that you move in Society*) was grooming

me for bed, an awful feeling of hopeless depression, a hideous miasma, a—a—

THE MARCHIONESS (*her voice tremulous with the tenseness—don't forget to bring in the word "tense" as often as possible—of her agitation*). Call it hump, my dear, and have done with it.

THE HEROINE (*continuing*). A—a sudden grip of despair seized my soul in both its hands. (*You can't go in for too much of this kind of English; it is highly popular at the seaside.*) My thoughts, travelling back along the unweeded path of my past, compelled me to realise that I am not fit to be put in the same acre patch as my beloved Algernon.

THE MARCHIONESS (*wiping her eyes after an exhausting attack of laughter*). My good Jane, I can't stand it. I am at full tension, and something may go at any moment if you *will* be funny.

THE HEROINE (*brushing the back of her hand lightly across her brow, in the usual altogether meaningless and somewhat plebeian manner*). It's jolly lucky for you, mother, that I know you to be, under your outer coating of paint, a very decent old sort. Otherwise you would drive me to the language of the poop.

THE MARCHIONESS (*smiling broadly; here throw in the name of the fashionable dentist who is responsible for her excellent teeth—he may very possibly present you with a set*

"*with compliments*"). All right, then. Get it off your chest. And I'll have a final pipe before roostin'.

THE HEROINE (*sitting at her mother's feet, in an attitude of sentimental discomfort, which can be made to appear extremely picturesque if you describe the almost diaphanous effect of the nightdress in the firelight; if you can possibly do so in such a way as to shock Mr Smith's bookstall boy your sales are assured*). Mother, Algernon's letter received to-night, the last letter I shall get from him before we are married, is enough to give, as dear Miss Tempest says, a canary the pip.

THE MARCHIONESS (*blowing clouds of tobacco smoke*). Why?

THE HEROINE (*starting up—always make her "start" up; it isn't English, but Mr Boothby introduced it some years ago, and it is always to be found in the highly popular "line" of six-shilling goods, whether they emanate from long-suffering islands or the supposed resting-places of notorious bards*). Why? Read it. It almost makes me wish I had never found my wings. Please miss the postscript.

THE MARCHIONESS (*beginning at the postscript in the inevitable maternal manner*). Um—um—um (*reading with a curious smile the handwriting which came to her daily six months ago*). "You who are so good, so pure, so innocent, so fresh, so far above me—whose presence

will be as incense to me. . . ." Ha—hmm! Very nice, and all that, don't yer know. I see you haven't mentioned young Jarcombe to him?

THE HEROINE. Not much! That's what's worrying me so frightfully. What the blaz— What the dick— What in the world (*your heroine must never really swear, you know*) would he do? He is so noble, so splendid, so refined, so—so—so dashed straitlaced!

THE MARCHIONESS (*with a jerk*). Who?

THE HEROINE (*with tremendous surprise*). Why, Algernon, of course.

THE MARCHIONESS (*biting her underlip rather hard*). Oh, ah! yes, of course, of course. Yes, yes—oh, rather. But—er—what makes you think so, Jane? Did he tell you so himself?

THE HEROINE. Yes, he did, and so did everybody else. No one can mention a single thing against him.

THE MARCHIONESS (*thoughtfully*). Um, Algy breaks all previous records in the Eleventh Commandment contest. However, my dear, don't fret and grow problems of Euclid all over your face. If he ever points the Jarcombe episode, refer him to me.

THE HEROINE (*with very natural and very filial suspicion*). To you, mother! But you hardly know him!

THE MARCHIONESS. True, but I've always taken a

mild interest in him. At one time we were quite—friendly—in an anæmic kind of way, don't yer know. He is one of those curious men who divide women into two sets: the set from which he chooses a wife—the Eleventh Commandment set—and the—the other set, so to speak.

THE HEROINE. And in which set, dear mother, did he place you?

[You don't answer your heroine's question. You end your chapter, and leave people to form their own conclusions. You may be certain that what they will think will be quite unfit for you to put into cold print even between the covers of a Society novel. After a long description of each article of clothing doffed by the Marchioness and a subtle puff for the person who built it, you will fill up eight or nine chapters of your book with letters from somebody to anybody else on any subject that may occur to you, in order to be in the fashion, and then you will begin your last chapter but one. In this you will take us to Algernon's bedroom. It must be the evening before his marriage, and he may be in his pyjamas if you really know how to describe them. If not, let it be evening dress, which speaks for itself. Of course you will deal with the usual collection of

female photographs, the familiar silver cigarette-cases from "B. to A.," the easel upon which is a full-length figure of the Marchioness as a water-sprite, or merely as a study, in which the puzzle is to find the chiffon. You will then describe Algernon, and make young Jarcombe "loll"—a Ouida word which Miss Corelli has annexed—in a huge armchair with his open-worked stockinged feet on the mantelpiece, and plunge into your "problem" again in the following easy manner:—

ALGERNON (*he must always be Algernon if he isn't Aubrey*). You see, my dear Jarcombe, unlike yourself (*your hero must be personal or he wouldn't be a hero*) I have always looked upon marriage as a very sacred thing.

YOUNG JARCOMBE (*who supplies your comedy*). Your marriage, or other people's?

ALGERNON. Mine, naturally.

YOUNG JARCOMBE. Naturally. I forgot.

ALGERNON (*pacing the room with the usual long stride, and running his fingers through his inevitably curly hair, which sets like astrachan upon his patrician head—or words to that effect*). I hold—I've always held that a man who has lived, so to speak, ought only to marry a girl who is—is absolutely—er—against whom, in short, there is absolutely nothing.

YOUNG JARCOMBE. A very sensible, comfortable thing to hold, too. Go on holding it.

ALGERNON. That's just it. I can't. When I look back at the cerise blotches upon the milestones of my life, and think how pure, how spotless is Jane, I feel that I am unworthy to marry her—unworthy . . . unworthy. (*Repeat as often as you like, with as many dots as you can.*) Oh, my dear Jarcombe, what would a girl like Jane, a girl with all her great ideals and difficult theories, say if she stumbled upon any of my tinted milestones?

YOUNG JARCOMBE. The Marchioness episode, for instance? Well, old man, if she does, refer her to me.

ALGERNON. You? Why, you hardly know her!

YOUNG JARCOMBE. Quite so; but I've always taken a mild interest in her—quite mild, and not at all bitter. You must be extremely careful never to be found out. She is one of those curious women who divide men into two sets: the set from which she chooses a husband—the Eleventh Commandment set—and—the other set, so to speak.

ALGERNON (*turning and looking young Jarcombe straight in the face*). And in which set, my very dear fellow, did she place you?

[*Again you end a chapter, for the same reason. With*

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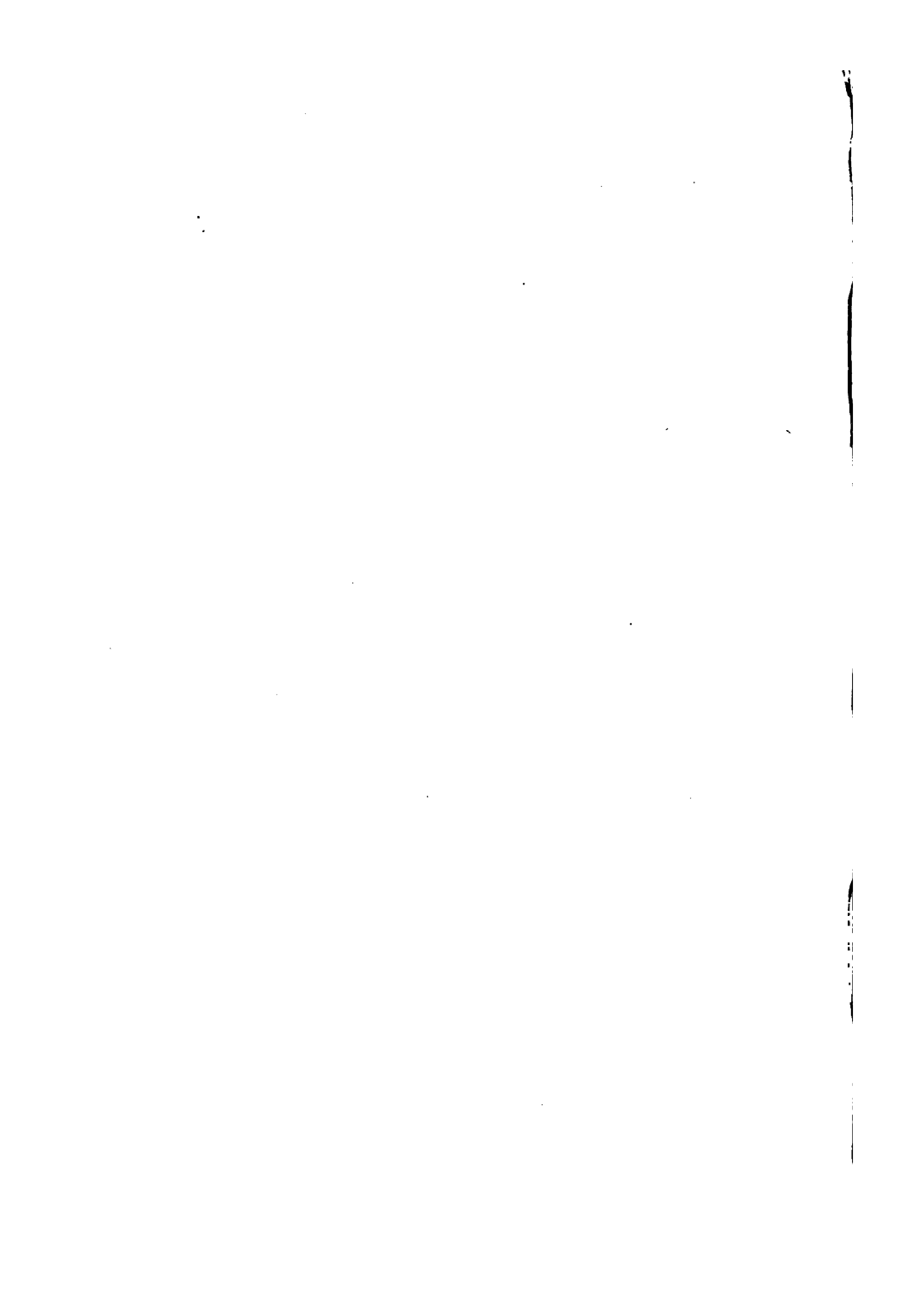
a sigh of some regret you then write chapter fifty-five "and last," and it must contain not more than a dozen pointed lines, which must have quite a lot between them, as follows:—

THE HEROINE (*whom you are taking in a special train to Dover, en route for Calais and the honeymoon*). And so, my king, you are an old friend of mother's?

THE HERO. Your mother's? Oh, ah, yes. Yes. She—she took a great—interest in me. Er—have you known young Jarcombe long, my queen?

THE HEROINE (*meeting his eye, in which there is a quaint half-smile, with three-quarters of one even quainter*). Jarky? Oh, Lor', yes. Rather. Ever since I was quite a kid.

[*And then, for no apparent reason, you write "Finis" and go in to dinner.*]



THE NEW RÉGIME

SCENE—*The stage of Herrick's Theatre, on the morning of the first rehearsal of the new play by the Premier English Dramatist—whoever that may be. According to theatrical paragraphists there are twenty-seven. The curtain is up. There is a table in the centre of the newly-watered stage at the edge of the unlighted footlights. A chair lolls on one side of it with a superior manner, as who should say, "I shall eventually contain one of the twenty-seven Premier English Dramatists." Another chair, with more humble mien, stands on the other side of the table. It is merely for the use of the Stage Manager. The cold light of day floods everything—not altogether to its advantage. Stage necessities, including actors and actresses, look their best in the limelight. A wise actress is never seen by day.*

Seated in peculiarly easy attitudes, or standing in attitudes equally peculiar, but rather more difficult to achieve, there are some twenty-two young women and

young men, dressed in the height of fashionable bad taste. Their loud shouts of laughter echo through the empty theatre.

Standing down stage on the O. P. side is Mr Roderick Herrick, the greatest English actor-manager (according to paragraphists there are eighty). His usually straight back is bent humbly and deferentially, although he is talking in a somewhat supercilious manner to the greatest English leading lady (according to paragraphists there are three thousand). In the distance, peeping out from behind pieces of ruined castles, strips of the distempered walls of little houses in Curzon Street, and limbs of ancient oak trees and the weeping willow, there are numerous surprised, amused, and, it is to be feared, all too rubicund faces of stage hands.

MR HERRICK. My dear Miss Grace, I feel bound, before dealing with purely business matters, to express to you, in the carefully-chosen English for which I am beyond dispute so famous, the—the joy—the restrained, the highly actor-managerial joy—with which I welcome an actress so distinguished, so well-paragraphed as yourself, to my poor, although undoubtedly premier, English theatre.

MISS GRACE (*slightly inclining her head and silently shedding a brass hairpin*). Um-um. But what about—

MR HERRICK (*whipping in*). Allow me to get through the formula which is established by precedent and means absolutely nothing. Er—oh, yes, undoubtedly premier English theatre. Believe me, my dear Miss Grace, it is an honour which I feel nearly, which, as a matter of fact, renders it necessary for me to struggle with my obvious emotion.

MISS GRACE (*placing the contents of her handkerchief on each cheek in equal proportions with amazing dexterity*). Um-um, old man. Quite so. Taken as spoke. But what about—

MR HERRICK (*again stepping where an angel would think twice about treading*). I am even more convinced than are our friends the paragraphists that the combination of you and I—you and me—you and—I forget which it is?

MISS GRACE (*readily*). You and I, on the stage; you and me, off it.

MR HERRICK. Is that so? Thank you *so* much. I always get mixed between the two, and the dramatists seem equally uncertain—the critics can't be supposed to know. Where was I?

MISS GRACE. You had reached the—

MR HERRICK. Oh, ah! yes—the combination of you

and I will establish a record in things dramatic such has 'as—I mean as has never been known before on the stage of Great Britain.—Er—

MISS GRACE (*affably, but firmly*). Good. That's all right, old man—A 1. I know the rest by heart. But what about my part, and who wrote the play?

MR HERRICK (*with dignity*). The premier English dramatist, of course.

MISS GRACE. Which of 'em? But it don't matter. After all, nowadays, the play's not the thing by a long chalk. It's the—(*with a sniff*)—the supers.

MR HERRICK. Exactly. And so, recognising that conspicuous fact, and wishing to keep my beautiful place in Park Lane about my ears, I have decided to make a departure from the beaten track.

MISS GRACE. And you've chucked Shakespeare?

MR HERRICK (*fervently*). For ever.

MISS GRACE. And old English comedy?

MR HERRICK. For forty years—until I'm old enough to play Charles Surface.

MISS GRACE. And the modern blank—blank verse thing, all boom and no shot, all pudding and no currants, all puff and no pastry?

MR HERRICK (*with a long-drawn sigh*). Ra-ther. What do *you* think?

MISS GRACE. Then—although I can't imagine what it

is you've got hold of—you look like makin' a bit at last.

MR HERRICK (*a little ruefully*). I think so too, but it will cost me tears of blood to do it, because it is necessary for me to keep out of the line of lime—in plain English, to sink my artistic feelings and play a subordinate part.

MISS GRACE. Oh, that'll be all right, so long as I have a lot to do.

MR HERRICK (*with very natural glee*). Ah, but you won't, you know, you won't.

MISS GRACE (*in what is technically known as a voice of thunder*). How's that?

MR HERRICK. I'll tell you. Inspired by what has already been done on other people's stages on quite a small scale, I suggested to the Premier English Dramatist that he should chuck writing literary drama and just dash off a play dealing with the scandals and disgraces committed by about twenty-one of the younger members of the aristocracy, male and female, and I told him that, if he would do this, I would undertake to engage the very people he was writing about to play their own parts, and—

MISS GRACE (*trembling with excitement*). And—and—

MR HERRICK (*immensely gratified at the impression he*

had created). Quite so. And there they are, from the Duke of Rotherhithe downwards.

MISS GRACE. But they'll touch you for the most enormous salaries !

MR HERRICK (*chuckling*). Oh, no, they won't. They don't touch me for a bob in salary. Where they come in is on commission—two shillings on every stall sold, half a sovereign on every box, eighteenpence on every dress circle, fourpence on every pit, and three halfpence on every gallery, and a certain percentage of the gross for their services as advertising media—I mean, for plastering my posters on their motors and carriages, wearing the name of my theatre round their hats and wrists and worked into the design of their frocks and on their shirt fronts. Come, I'll present you to their Graces, and their Lord and Ladyships. I've got no mere Honourables here. Don't tremble, but come.

[*Miss Grace again has recourse to her handkerchief for the usual female reason, and follows Mr Herrick, lost in admiration.*]

AT THE OPERA

SCENE—*That whitewashed building of pre-Ark design which slumbers heavily the greater part of the year, surrounded with bits of cabbage, crates of oranges, riff-raff of both sexes, bedding-out plants, and un-Parliamentary English, and which opens its eyes at stated periods late at night for Fancy Dress Balls, and for conversations with operatic accompaniments. As the curtain rises on "Romeo et Juliette," the Duchess of Brighton enters with Major Dick Raffles.*

THE DUCHESS (*after forcing her way into the middle of a line of stalls, sitting down, pumped, dishevelled, but peculiarly equable*). *What a scramble!*

THE MAJOR (*sitting by her side, much blown*). Phew! Scramble, you call it. By Jove, Duchess, I'd rather go back to the front and take a laager any day of the week.

THE DUCHESS (*readjusting the position of her tiara and rebalancing the cascade of diamonds she wears round her neck*). Say, Raffles, old man, but you make me

smile! Your discontented mouth is enough to turn cream sour. For my part, next to toffee, there's nothing I love so much as push.

THE MAJOR (*working the bow of his tie round to the front of his collar*). Yes, but then you were born under the shadow of the Stars and Stripes. I say, though, what *is* this opera? Is it the *San Toy* I've heard so much about?

THE DUCHESS. *San Toy!* Oh, Raffles, *dear*, for my sake don't put your great foot over the rail of decency into the marked-off bed of the absurd. No, it ain't *San Toy*. This is Royal Opera—but, say, I've no more notion what this pertick'ler piece is than I have of how many oranges come from one pip. Ask your neighbour if you're aching to know.

THE MAJOR (*to a floral, florid, flabby lady on his left*). I beg your pardon, but have you by any chance any sort of a notion as to what it is we're listening to?

F. F. F. LADY (*in a deep bass voice*). I am not listening to anything. I am merely here to be looked at. When I come to the opera I invariably place cotton-wool in my ears, in order that my attention may not be distracted.

THE MAJOR (*holding on to his stall—he is slightly uncivilised.*) Oh! thanks so much! (*To the Duchess.*)

My neighbour is a little—curious. Ask the man next to you, will you? I *should* like to know.

THE DUCHESS (*to a bald-headed, waxed-up person of uncertain years balancing, with much gymnastic success, a large-sized eyeglass in a small-sized eye*). Pardon me interrupting the even tenor of your thoughts, but *do* you recognise this opera?

B. W. P. (*trying to turn his head ever so little and failing*). Haw—what? Oh, yes, thanks, recognised nearly everybody. There's just one person I can't place. Perhaps you know her. Look, between that chap who looks like a Cabinet Minister or a pork butcher and that lady, who must either be a vegetarian or a Primrose Dame. Can you see her? Now, I believe it's the new marchioness, or, if not, it's the celebrated lady dog-trickster. Eh—what?

THE DUCHESS (*with much dignity*). I am not on a footing of bosom friendship with either of 'em, sir, so to speak. Thank you for your information. (*To the Major.*) Raffles, old man, another magpie. I take it my neighbour's a journalist. Why, say, what *are* you about, anyhow?

THE MAJOR (*beaming*). Just caught the eye of a pal of mine in the Service, and I'm telegraphing to him, on the Morse principle, to ask him if he knows.

THE DUCHESS (*dodging*). Say, mind my tiara.

THE MAJOR (*spelling out his friend's reply*). L-i-t-t-l-e.

THE DUCHESS. Little—well?

THE MAJOR. C-h-r-i-s-t-o-p-h-e-r.

THE DUCHESS (*getting interested*). Christopher—go on.

THE MAJOR. C-o-l-u-m-b-u-s.

THE DUCHESS. Columbus! Say, but your friend's got a sunstroke or a touch of fever. Anyway, he must be away here without proper restraint. That's a burlesque—that Columbus thing.

THE MAJOR (*getting rampant*). My hat, so it is. I must know what the piece is. I simply must. (*He leans forward and puts his head bravely between the shoulders of two exquisitely pretty home-grown girls.*) So sorry to trouble you, but can you tell me the name of this opera?

FIRST GIRL (*with a ready smile*). It's *Faust*, by Wagner.

SECOND GIRL (*simultaneously*). It's *Tannhäuser*, by Gounod.

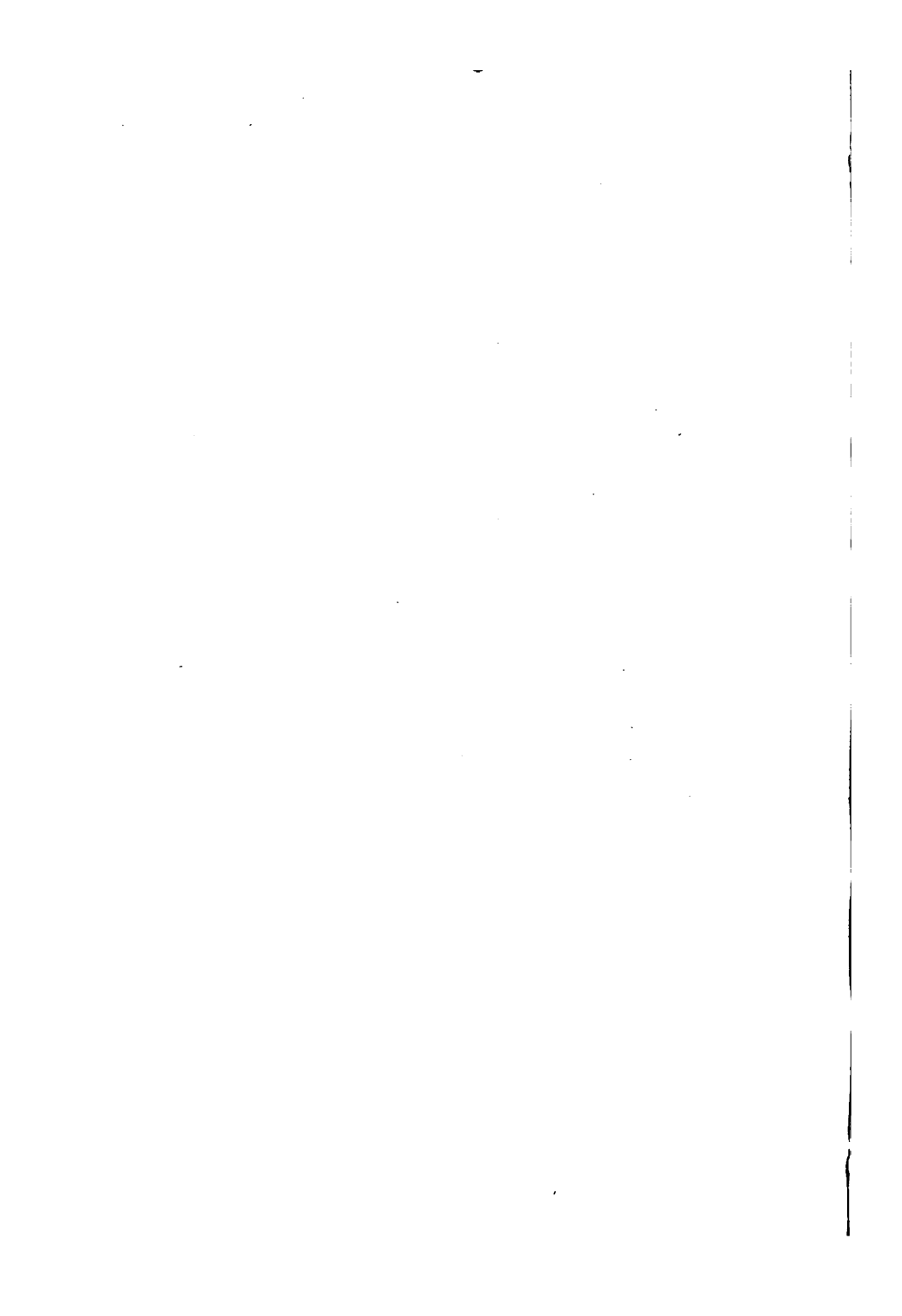
THE MAJOR (*gasping for breath, but forcing a smile*). Thank you so much. So much obliged. (*To Duchess, in a hoarse, tragic whisper*). Did you hear that? Oh, my goodness!

THE DUCHESS (*as bland as ever*). Now, don't become erotic. Most like—Wagner's *Faust* is the first half

and Gounod's *Tannhäuser* the second. You never know. But it doesn't count one way or the other. Everybody is so bright that, thank goodness, the music doesn't interrupt the conversation as much as it did last year. I think it's such bad taste for a body of singers to come forward and shout the people in the house down, don't you? You see, Raffles, one only comes here because everybody else comes, and because so much loud talk gives one an appetite and that kind of thing. As for me—

THE MAJOR (*who has been watching the stage intently*). A balcony—a woman leaning down, a man leaning on —(*with a triumphant shout*). By Gad, I've got it! It's *Romeo and Juliet*." Now I don't mind what happens. I shall be able to tell 'em at the Club what it was I saw. Go on, Duchess, babble on, dear lady.

[*And, nothing loth, on the Duchess babbles.*]



THE DANGER OF INSULARITY

SCENE—*A smoking-carriage on the Brighton line whimsically labelled "First Class." Seated with his back to the engine is the Rev. Canon Elmer Wynnstay Wynnstay-Elmer, D.D., LL.D., Chairman of the National Society for the Promotion of the Rudiments of Religion among the Females of the Smart Set (the N.S.P.R.R.F.S.S.).*

Since the train is approaching Redhill with anti-luncheon ponderosity, it follows that the Canon has been almost able to remove from his smooth black the cloud of dust which covered it as he sat upon the L.B. and S.C.R. cushions.

THE CANON (*blowing one or two remaining specks from the tips of his fingers and addressing himself aloud*).
Ah! how true it is that cleanliness comes in a good second to godliness; or rather—but it don't matter. When one has tipped a guard to put one in an empty

compartment one can afford to be a little careless in one's phraseology. Now for my papers. The *Parent*, just to glance at the report of my address to the N.S.P.R.R.F.S.S. at the Carlton—I am glad it was evening dress. Quite gorgeous figures. Brings the crying need of the spread of religion among them so much nearer home. And *Put-me-down-quickly*, a paper which affords a striking keynote to the youthful mind of the moment with which clergymen must be in touch. (*Opens it.*) Ah, yes; very amusing, very, and—er—very indelicate, though, at the same time, the curves are excellently well done. Indeed, one might go further and call it—”

[*The train enters the station at Redhill, and stops with the well-known L.B. and S.C.R. jerk. The handle of the carriage is instantly seized, and as the door opens, Put-me-down-quickly, with a consummate knowledge of the wicked mind of the world, slides under the Parent. Enter General Sir Chesney Rudd Gascoigne, K.C.B., etc., in a fur coat, bowler hat, and brown boots. He sees the Canon. A look of shyness flashes among the many wrinkles of his good-natured face. He attempts to return to the platform to enter another smoker, the train starts, and he falls into a heap*

on the seat opposite the Canon, blushing like a schoolboy.]

THE GENERAL (*mentally*). Yes, by gad! it *is* a sky-pilot, and we don't stop till we put in at Croydon. He looks smooth and well-filled enough to be a Bishop. Wonder if he objects to smoking?

THE CANON (*mentally, eyeing the old soldier with the supercilious suspicion of upper-middle insularity*). That guard has done me out of half-a-crown. I shall certainly report him. I can never meditate when I am observed—and that is such a very, very characteristic number of *Put-me-down-quickly*. Dear me, the person is going to smoke. I shall reek of tobacco when I arrive at the society's office. That cynical secretary will, of course, jump to the conclusion that I have been smoking—after I have been so carefully munching tea-leaves, too. Ah, life is indeed full of crosses. I wonder what he is?

THE COLONEL (*mentally, as he lights his pipe, squirming under the searching gaze of the opposition, which he hesitates to meet*). What the dooce is he starin' at? Lord, how I hate your man with the mind of a valuer! He makes a fellow feel exactly like bankrupt stock.

[The train shuffles and snuffles past the long rows of delightful advertisement boards which stand out so

well against the convenient green of the meadows. The General opens a paper and catches the Canon's inquiring though cathedral eye. Upon which both men are suddenly intensely interested in the pro-Voysey design on the padding of the carriage.]

THE CANON (*mentally*). A very reserved man, evidently. A kind of grey-haired oyster. Must be either a Peer or a professional by his clothes—unless, indeed, like most of them, he is both. There is something quite aristocratic about the poise of the head and cut of the nostrils. Dear me, I *may* be travelling with quite a distinguished man! Nay, not *may* be, but, rather, as there is a bowler hat above a fur-lined coat, *must* be. (*He purrs suddenly.*)

THE GENERAL (*again catching the calculating clerical eye*). By Gad! what in the name of all—my—my goodness! I believe he's going to tackle me on my beliefs, or some other equally awkward thing. (*Unable to stand the well-directed fire without cover, the General beats a hasty retreat, placing his morning paper between himself and the enemy. In doing so a piece of burning tobacco falls out of his pipe and nestles affectionately in the fur lining of his coat.*)

THE CANON (*who has seen it fall*). Dear me, now his is very awkward! I should like — my natural

Christian instincts urge me—to lean forward and slap that part of his coat until the spark is out. He is evidently a man of some distinction or he wouldn't glare at me as though I had no right upon the face of the earth. But he might hit me if I slapped him! In which case, being only human and somewhat short-tempered, I might land him one in the wind, and that would never do. Secondly—I mean—and yet, at the same time, if I do not instantly make some decisive action, that coat will be on fire, and a host of souls will be in jeopardy—to say nothing about my own danger and discomfort. He's not at all the sort of man, however, I should care to speak to without a formal introduction. Dear me, what an unpleasant smell burning fur gives forth. What, *what* is the correct, the *English* thing to do? Great Scott!—er—good gracious! How quickly it spreads. Like a drop of ink on blotting-paper, or irreverence in the multitude. Dear me, surely the crisis warrants my gently leaning forward, with a smile in which there is nothing of familiarity, and saying, "Sir, I *beg* your pardon; but perhaps you would like to know that your coat is on fire"? or, again, pleasantly, "Would you excuse me"—leaving out the formal "Sir," perhaps—"I am rather under the impression that, from the smoke issuing from your coat, and the odour which generally accompanies the burning of

fur, and other hairy matter, you may have had a slight accident which needs your immediate but not nervous attention"? But I do so hesitate to appear to be making overtures to a personage—evidently a personage: I see he wears odd gloves—to whom I have not had the honour of a formal presentation. But, pouf!—something, some sacrifice of our mutual instinct of good breeding *must* be made. It's spreading like—like Billy-Oh! Could he be offended or outraged if I said, "Sir, as a brother-Christian, a fellow-inhabitant of this Great Empire, of which, I feel certain, we are equally proud, companion units in the same vast arithmetical problem, allow me to waive a hand-made etiquette, a mere insular formality peculiar to this country, to tell you, although unable to claim the honour of your acquaintance, that your coat is on fire, and that, in a few short moments, you will be ablaze"? . . . Croydon! Providence intervenes! My dignity is spared.

[Hastily collecting his papers, umbrella, rug and small hand-bag, the Canon leaves the carriage and pounces with anthem-like blandness upon the guard.]

THE CANON (*intoning with unaccustomed accuracy*).
Guard, here is my card. You will take it to that little

grey-haired gentleman in the fur-lined coat, saying after me—I mean, saying, “Sir, the Canon’s compliments, and he wishes me to call your attention to the fact that your coat will shortly be a flame of fire. It is caused by an almost minute piece of lighted tobacco which fell from your pipe just outside Redhill.”

[Giving the wide-eyed man a slight push, the Canon turns away and enters, with a beautiful, urbane smile, in which there is a touch of triumph, an empty compartment. Wherefore England stands where England stood.]



“PERCY FLAGE”

SCENE—*A backwater above Marlow, on a scorching July afternoon. Sir Ebenezer Ashpan—manufacturer of the imitation new-laid egg, donor of £300,000 to the Patriotic Funds, consequently a Baronite and a P.C.—and Lady Ashpan, entering the backwater in Wot O! their ridiculous little electric launch, flying their even more ridiculous coat-of-arms on a lady's silk pocket-handkerchief, followed by their week-end party in punts, canoes and double-scullers.*

Four flunkeys, with powdered wigs, spring very cleverly on to the bank as the launch slows down, and tie her nose to a laughing weeping willow, and then proceed, with great despatch and some quite quiet amusement, to lay tea on the grass.

Lady Ashpan, her flaming cheeks shining through her powder, like red arms through inferior muslin, waddles, panting, to a suitable eminence, and sits heavily upon it.

LADY ASHPAN (*with a gasp*). 'Ot? O Lordy, Lordy!

SIR EBENEZER. Grumbling agin! Lor' bless my soul, what *do* yer want? When it's just nice and warm, you call it a 'eat wave and make your will. When it's a heast wind and a rainin' like a busted biler, you complain of the cold and go to bed in flannel and lie atween the blankets. I didn't mind your bein' like this afore I discovered the imitation new-laid-egg dodge; but now, as a Baronit's lady, with more raw oof than you can spend even if you make a beast of yerself, with a residence in Mayfair, a family manchin up North, and a place on the river, entertainin', every week-end, the primest lot of upper ten on the markit—reg'lar flarers—there ain't no excuse for yer, not a bit. Don't let me 'ave ter complain agin. Be bright. Be saucy. Be "shick," as the French Ambassador sez. Do as other women does when the sun makes 'em thaw. Get behind the nearest obstacle and put on a new coat o' powder. Look at *me*. Indigestion like the very deuce, a red-hot needle goin' in and out of my off-side big toe, with the regularity of a piston-rod of the engine of a Scotch express, and a pair of patents that are grippin' me till I could shout. But *look* at me! Look at the h'easy grice what I doles out to my aristocratic pals. Look at my Percy Flage—or whatever the chap's name is. You watch me, Maria, and take a lesson. (*Shooting his pink cuffs with the accuracy of a musical-comedy duke, and sticking*

his thumbs into the arms of his wide expanse of waistcoat, he crosses to the edge of the river like a jaunty mountain.)

MRS REGGIE PSHAW (*from the bottom of Esmé Flannox's punt—Flannox of the Irish Guards, brother to The Brat, you know, who runs the Fond Fools Club in Half Moon Street*). Dear Sir Ebenezer (*quoting his well-known trade mark*), Semper vigilans, eh?

SIR EBENEZER (*purring with pleasure*). Ay, Mrs Reggie, that's the ticket. Be careful 'ow you git out, or you'll rumple that pretty frock, which makes you look quite young.

ESMÉ FLANNOX (*involuntarily*). Haw! Haw! (*catches Mrs Reggie's red-hot eye*) Ha! Hmmm!

MRS REGGIE (*taking Sir Ebenezer's hand and stepping rather creakily ashore*). My dear man, how giddy you are, really. If one didn't know it to be contrary to all the laws of nature, one would say that you must have lived in the days of Queen Elizabeth. Your politeness is almost excessive.

SIR EBENEZER (*tremendously pleased and meaning to do better*). You mayn't believe me, Mrs Reggie, but it's reg'lar wonderful the effect of all that paint and stuff in the distance. Until you laugh, and I can see how long in the tooth you are, 'pon my soul, I shouldn't put you down at more than thirty.

MRS REGGIE (*speechless with anger*). Grrrrh!

SIR EBENEZER (*sympathetically*). Rheumatics? . . . Ah, the pains and penalties of old age, Mrs P., eh wot? A little massage 'ud do you a deal o' good, and . . . (*in a confidential and somewhat roguish whisper*) a reef or two let out round the waist.

[*Poor Mrs Reggie subsides on the first mound of moss, wordlessly.*]

ESMÉ FLANNOX (*kneeling in the punt with his contorted face to the river*). Oh, ye gods! He, he! ye gods! Haw, haw! ye gods!

SIR EBENEZER (*almost startled—thinking, as he knows Flannox has travelled largely, that it must be an Eastern form of prayer*). Oh, sorry to disturb you, my Lord. Didn't think an awful howler like you went in for that kind of thing! Well I never!

ESMÉ FLANNOX (*arranging his features and stepping on shore*). Ashpan, old feller, I'm doosid glad you discovered that imitation new-laid egg, made such a pile, and became a leader of Society. Goodness only knows what we should do without you, now that the music-halls are so select and dull. Bless you, very much, dear old boy. Go on like that, and you'll dissipate the National Hump. You will, take it from me. (*Slapping Sir Ebenezer heartily and sincerely on the back, he passes on to Mrs Reggie, with an expression of not very well simulated*

indignation and sympathy, and there follows the low, angry rumble of an elderly feminine voice. With a what-did-I-tell-you look at his still panting wife, Sir Ebenezer waits for the next punt to arrive.)

SIR EBENEZER (*gaily*). Come along, Lady Mary, come along. Tea's all ready! The sooner it's over, the sooner you'll be able to paddle our young friend Radish away for a spoon, eh wot?

LADY MARY QUORN (*blushing from head to foot*). And what kind of thing is a spoon, Sir Ebenezer? (*She darts an extremely uncomfortable glance at the rich Radish whom she is trying to induce to put his feet into her well-laid bird-lime.*)

SIR EBENEZER (*handing her out of canoe*). Oh, go hon, little innercent! We know her little gime, don't we, Radish, eh? . . . Be careful, my dear, or you'll wet your little feet, and they *are* nice little feet, ain't they Radish, eh? And ain't my Lady got a neat way of showin' us the time o' day by the clocks on her stockings, too, that's all? So unconscious all the while; most surprised when it's mentioned! . . . Ah, ha! (*he pats Lady Mary's indignant hand*) you're a smart one, my dear, you are. What you don't know ain't worth knowin', is it, eh? Lady Mary Radish, as is ter be, I wish yer luck. She's fairly got you on a bit o' string, Radish, my boy. With your money and her brains, there's nothing in the social

line you won't be able to achieve atween yer. Tea all ready! Get along.

[Silent, and changing colour with the rapidity of a well-managed stage sunset, Lady Mary Quorn and Mr E. W. J. Radish make their way to the place where the tea is laid. Lady Mary's inmost thoughts would not be tolerated on paper in this very select country, and Radish wears the astonished look of a man who sees the moon through powerful glasses for the first time. In a like manner, growing more and more pleased with himself, Sir Ebenezer welcomes all his guests to his al fresco tea. He does not notice the expressions of furtive rage on most of the faces, and extreme although partially-suppressed amusement on the others. Nor does he find anything strange in the dead silence which sits upon everybody. He puts it down to the fact that they are all waiting eagerly to hear what he is going to say next—and he is not mistaken.]

SIR EBENEZER (*nudging his wife and whispering*). Did yer 'ear me? Did yer 'ear 'ow I did it? That's Percy Flage, that is, the very best, as used by all the leaders of Society. . . . Now then, ladies and gents, tea. Say your own graces, and peg in.

TO SAVE THE HOUSE OF LORDS

A NEW PHILANTHROPIC PATRIOTIC SOCIETY

SCENE—*The vestibule of the Hôtel Embankment, yesterday or the day before. The usual bustle prevails. The impatient telephone bell rings incessantly in a little room on the left. Little boys with watered heads, dirty collars, and ill-fitting uniforms dodge through groups of absurdly-dressed people with strong nasal accents, shouting numbers at the tops of their voices. The click of many typewriters issues from a little room on the right; the lift bell and the cab gong jar the very foundations of the building, and as one cab arrives with all sorts and conditions of men, another departs with all sorts and conditions of women, and there is no peace.*

On a lounge in the passage outside the dining-room is seated a healthy-looking boy of, perhaps, twenty-five years of age. His Panama hat is tilted at an angle of forty-five degrees, and he is chuckling with intense amusement over a "Real Conversation" in one of the

more respectable magazines. Because he is nursing a hideously-beautiful bull-pup and is wearing a broad band of gold studded with opals round his left ankle, because there is a distinct gleam of devilry in his grey eyes, and because his socks are open-work, it is quite unnecessary, in these days of penny tabloid journalism of untruthful personalities, to say that he is the Earl of Whippingham, commonly called "Ping."

BOY (*with watered hair and dirty collar, in the distance*). One 'undred an' one, please.

WHIPPINGHAM (*to himself*). By Jove! What delicious egoism! What—

BOY (*dodging under the arms of a mountain of female Americanism*). One 'undred an' one, please.

WHIPPINGHAM (*still to himself*). Wonder if it's meant to be so frightfully funny. If so, it's simply immense. If it's not—

BOY (*springing out of the way of a dapper little man in boots three sizes too long and trousers two sizes too tight*). One 'undred and one, please.

WHIPPINGHAM. . . . Then it's the most colossal example the world has ever seen of what a man can achieve who has no sense of humour.

BOY (*passing Whippingham with a dull but dogged face*). One 'undred an' one, please.

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WHIPPINGHAM. Hi, you! Were you callin' a number, by any chance?

BOY (*with pathetic reproof*). Was I callin' a—

WHIPPINGHAM. Very well, then. What was it?

BOY (*slowly, with sarcastic care*). One—'undred—hand—whone—please—sir!

WHIPPINGHAM (*laughing*). You're a rummy little Johnny, ain't you? It's my number. What is it?

BOY (*with a look of intense relief*). Well, it's a laidy ter see yer, on importing business, an' she won't give her nime.

WHIPPINGHAM (*extremely interested*). A lady—to see me? What sort of lady?

BOY (*after some thought*). No sort of laidy, sir. S'fer as I cud see frem a casual squint, I put 'er darn as jist a laidy. Wot I mean is, she ain't one of those as is guaranteed ter knock darn a short-sighted cab 'orse at forty yards, nor nuthink o' that kind. She ain't wot I calls a coloured imitation—or a transfer. As I say, she's—she's jist a laidy, an' there you are. Might be a bishop's daughter, or—or the daughter of a man 'oo wears a white top 'at and keeps 'is 'oss, or—

WHIPPINGHAM (*cutting in*). All right. Just show the lady along.

BOY. Very good, sir. . . . (*With genuine concern*)
I beg pardon, I should er said, me lord. There

now! Blest ef I ain't bin callin' you "sir" all along. (*Anxiously*) I ain't let myself in fer forty shillin' or one month, 'ave I? . . . You're laughin', so I suppose it's all right. But it wasn't my fault. You should be a bit more like a lord. I've seen 'em at the Gaiety, so I oughter know—on the stige, I mean. Where's yer white spats an' chess-board trousers, white wiskit, an' red tie wif a full-sized 'orse-shoe pin, set wif himitation dimings? Besides, you ain't suckin' a little tree, nor wearin' a 'andful of gold locketts 'anging darn from yer belt. Yer collar ain't like the white-washed funnel of a penny steamer; and you don't say, "Dash it hall, deah boy, bwandy sodah!" Why, if anybody was ter ask me fer the honest truth, I shed say you looked a very respectable feller—almost a gent.

[Leaving the amused Whippingham with a condescending nod, the boy saunters, with a good deal of elbow action, along the vestibule to the inquiry office. He is shortly after followed, on his return journey, by an extremely beautiful, simply-dressed, young-looking English girl. Full of admiration and curiosity, Whippingham rises, and with some regret removes his Panama.]

MISS MARGARET MIDSOMER ("for it is she," to quote

an expression peculiar to the lady novelist and the writer of detective stories). Lord Whippingham?

WHIPPINGHAM (*noticing with palpable delight that her eyes are violet*). Yes, thank you very much. But (*noticing that the fringes are as black as the wings of a crow*)—don't bother about me. *Do* sit down. I'm sure you're very tired.

MISS MIDSOMER (*blushing to the tips of her quite unique ears*). But *are* you Lord Whippingham?

WHIPPINGHAM (*inwardly debating whether her hair should be called burnished gold or hammered copper*). Oh, rather. Please don't worry about it. It's an accident which, I suppose, couldn't be avoided. I hope you won't find it very warm in this corner. Perhaps it would be cooler in the reading-room.

MISS MIDSOMER (*half-rising*). Perhaps—

WHIPPINGHAM (*hastily*). Although, mind you, I don't recommend the reading-room, because so many people prance about there at this time in the afternoon, and it's really quite utterly useless to attempt any private conversation. (*With a sudden gleam of smile*) It's rippin' weather for August, don't you think?

MISS MIDSOMER (*only showing how nervous she actually is by continually pulling the little finger of her left glove off and pushing it on again*). Lord Whippingham, I have not come to discuss the weather. I—

WHIPPINGHAM (*deferentially*). No, of course not. I beg your pardon. But, don't you know, I generally find that the weather melts the ice.

MISS MIDSOMER (*with an involuntary smile*). This kind of weather would melt any ice.

WHIPPINGHAM (*with a louder burst of laughter than is quite necessary*). Ha, ha, ha! Splendid. Would—would you like one, by the way? Oh, do!

MISS MIDSOMER (*trying to assume a calm, stately, impressive manner, and succeeding very fairly well*). Lord Whippingham, my name is Midsomer.

WHIPPINGHAM (*lost in admiration of the curls upon her forehead*). What a jolly backwater-punt-red-cushions-nasturtium-blazing-sun kind of name! Wish it were always with us. . . . I—I beg your pardon. I was thinking of—

MISS MIDSOMER (*suppressing a desire to smile*). And I am on the executive committee of the New Philanthropic Patriotic Society to—

WHIPPINGHAM. To give every Pro-Boer tuppence to go away and shout in another country. An excellent institution. Please put me down for—

MISS MIDSOMER. No. It's not political: it's domestic. The society is formed to save the House of Lords—

WHIPPINGHAM. Architecturally or spiritually?

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MISS MIDSOMER (*with great dignity*). Neither. To save the House of Lords from becoming the sole property of the American marriage market.

WHIPPINGHAM (*enthusiastically*). By Jove, what a thundering fine idea!

MISS MIDSOMER (*greatly pleased*). Do you—do you really think so?

WHIPPINGHAM. I should jolly well think I do, Miss Midsomer. (*His face suddenly falls*). But, I say, how in the world are we goin' to live if we *don't* marry Americans? Who else is goin' to keep us? We can't live on patriotism alone, don't you know.

MISS MIDSOMER. Quite so. We quite recognise that. Let me explain the—the fundamental idea of the society.

WHIPPINGHAM (*absently, following the curve of her chin with breathless admiration*). Fundamental will win in a walk.

MISS MIDSOMER (*almost wishing she were not a member of the executive committee*). The society has been formed by a body of girls of old county families—

WHIPPINGHAM. Pretty gels? But, of course, it's needless to ask.

MISS MIDSOMER (*at fifty miles an hour, with her eyes on the carpet*). Who have plenty of money, and

who, to prevent poor young English noblemen from selling themselves to rich Americans of no family, are themselves willing to sacrifice mere happiness, and marry these young men in order to keep up the prestige of—of the families whose—whose names they will thus bear at home and abroad.

WHIPPINGHAM (*extremely surprised*). By Jove! How—how very kind of you all! The question of love, then—

MISS MIDSOMER (*not catching his eye*). Is not gone into. Patriotism takes the place of love.

WHIPPINGHAM (*doubtfully*). Oh, but do tell me—patriotism isn't the same thing as platonicism, is it?

MISS MIDSOMER (*hurriedly*). I don't think so.

WHIPPINGHAM. Oh, that's all right. I hate all these isms. But am I to understand that you have been sent to me because you have heard that I have booked my berth to New York, and sail to-morrow to hunt for the inevitable heiress?

MISS MIDSOMER. Yes.

WHIPPINGHAM. By Jove, Miss Midsomer, Joan of Arc wasn't in it with you! I can almost hear the clash of your armour and see the gleam of your sword. One thing I'm jolly glad about, and that is, that you aren't wearing a helmet. Those bars are worse than veils. (*He*

laughs and begins to feel nervous, excited and ill at ease.)

Er—and havin' found me, and all that, may I ask what—what happens next?

MISS MIDSOMER (*rising and showing a keen interest in the pattern of the lounge*). You will please cancel your berth and call at the offices of the society at your earliest convenience. Good afternoon, Lord Whippingham.

[*She moves quickly towards the door.*

WHIPPINGHAM (*following her equally quickly*). I beg your pardon, but I sha'n't be asked to marry someone I—I've never seen yet, shall I?

MISS MIDSOMER (*still hurrying on*). No. According to Rule No. 3 you will be expected to become engaged to that member of the committee who waited upon you at your hotel.

WHIPPINGHAM (*joyfully*). That member being—

MISS MIDSOMER. Thank you. Don't trouble to get me a cab. This is my carriage. Good afternoon.

[*Without another word, and with averted head, Miss Midsomer, whose colour, as may easily be imagined, is quite philanthropic, quite Joan of Arcian, gets into the carriage.*]

WHIPPINGHAM (*leaning on the door, with an eye full of mischief*). Before you go, would you very kindly tell me your Christian name?

MISS MIDSOMER (*wishing to goodness blood had never been invented*). Margaret.

WHIPPINGHAM. When we're— When we know each other a bit better, I wonder if you'd mind my callin' you Magnet for short?

MISS MIDSOMER. Oh, please, please tell him to drive to 1101 Old Bond Street. I'm in a great hurry.

WHIPPINGHAM. 1101 Old Bond Street? Is that by any chance the office of the society? Yes? How extraordinary! What a rum coincidence! I'm on my way there too. Thank you *so* much for sayin' you'll give me a lift. (*To the coachman*) 1101 Old Bond Street, please. Sharp!

[*Whippingham springs in with a chuckle. The carriage moves out of the courtyard, and one representative of the House in question is saved.*]

A DRAMA IN GASPS

Lady Llangybi of Cardigan is giving a small and quite informal "feed" at the Hotel Spa Royal, Baden-Baden. There are, of course, present therefore several quite foreign royalties, the usual number of counts of no marked nationality, four or five star-spangled British noblewomen, a newly-created D.S.O. man just home, with a beautifully-browned face, and London's latest "leading lady." The two latter have been married for two and separated for three years, and, quite by accident, find themselves side by side at the dinner-table—not as partners in any sense.

HE. Joan!

SHE. Charlie!

HE. Beastly sorry.

SHE. Wasn't your fault.

HE. Thanks awfly.

SHE. The—the world is the—the smallest—

HE. Place goin'. Yes, quite.

INDISCRETIONS

[*Over his oysters Charlie Peto examines his wife closely in silence. To their mutual confusion, he catches her eye.*]

HE. Ha—Hhmm. Er—rippin' weather, what?

SHE. Delightful.

HE. Er—been wet often?

SHE. Every day!

HE. How rotten.

SHE. It isn't pleasant.

HE. No. May I—offer you the salt?

SHE. I never take it, thanks.

HE. No. I—I remember.

[*The red mullet occupies their next silence. She feels his eyes upon her seven times.*]

HE. Are you—pretty fit?

SHE. Quite, thank you. And you?

HE. Never better.

SHE. I'm *very* glad.

HE. You're *very* good.

[*Grilled mushrooms and hashed game. He feels her eyes upon him once, briefly, and again, searchingly.*]

SHE. You're a—a good deal thinner.

HE. Enteric twice, y'know.

SHE. Enteric! *Twice!* oh!

HE. Oh, that's all right.

SHE. All right?

HE. You—you look peaky.

SHE. Hard work.

HE. Hard *what?*

SHE. I've been on the stage all the while.

HE. My hat!

[*Sirloin. Potatoes. French beans. She feels his eyes upon her continuously.*]

HE. I'm dashed sorry.

SHE. Sorry?

HE. About the stage.

SHE. You needn't be.

HE. Why?

SHE. I—got used to it.

HE. Stoopid game.

SHE. Better than some.

[*Stuffed olives. He tries hard to catch her eye.*]

HE. What name did you take?

SHE. Nightingale.

HE. *No!*

SHE. Why?

HE. But—but everybody's talking about *her*!

SHE. Very nice of everybody—perhaps

HE. My hat! don't cher know!

SHE. You're famous too.

HE. Famous? *Me*? Poof!

SHE. You did it magnificently.

HE. How d'you know?

SHE. I take the papers.

HE. You never used to.

SHE. You never wrote.

HE. You didn't either.

SHE. You told me not to.

HE. You said you'd return mine.

SHE. Did I? I believe I did.

[*Partridges. Their eyes meet twice—by design.*]

HE. I say.

SHE. Say away.

HE. Been most shockin' anxious.

SHE. About what?

HE. About you.

SHE. As for me—

HE. As for you?

SHE. Fright has made these grey hairs come.

HE. Not really?

SHE. Indeed and indeed.

HE. Good Lor'!

[Iced pudding. They look at each other all the time.]

HE. I say.

SHE. What do you say?

HE. About that chap, don't y'know.

SHE. I know.

HE. What a rotter I was.

SHE. Weren't you!

HE. I knew there was nothin' in it.

SHE. I know you did.

HE. Why did you let me go then?

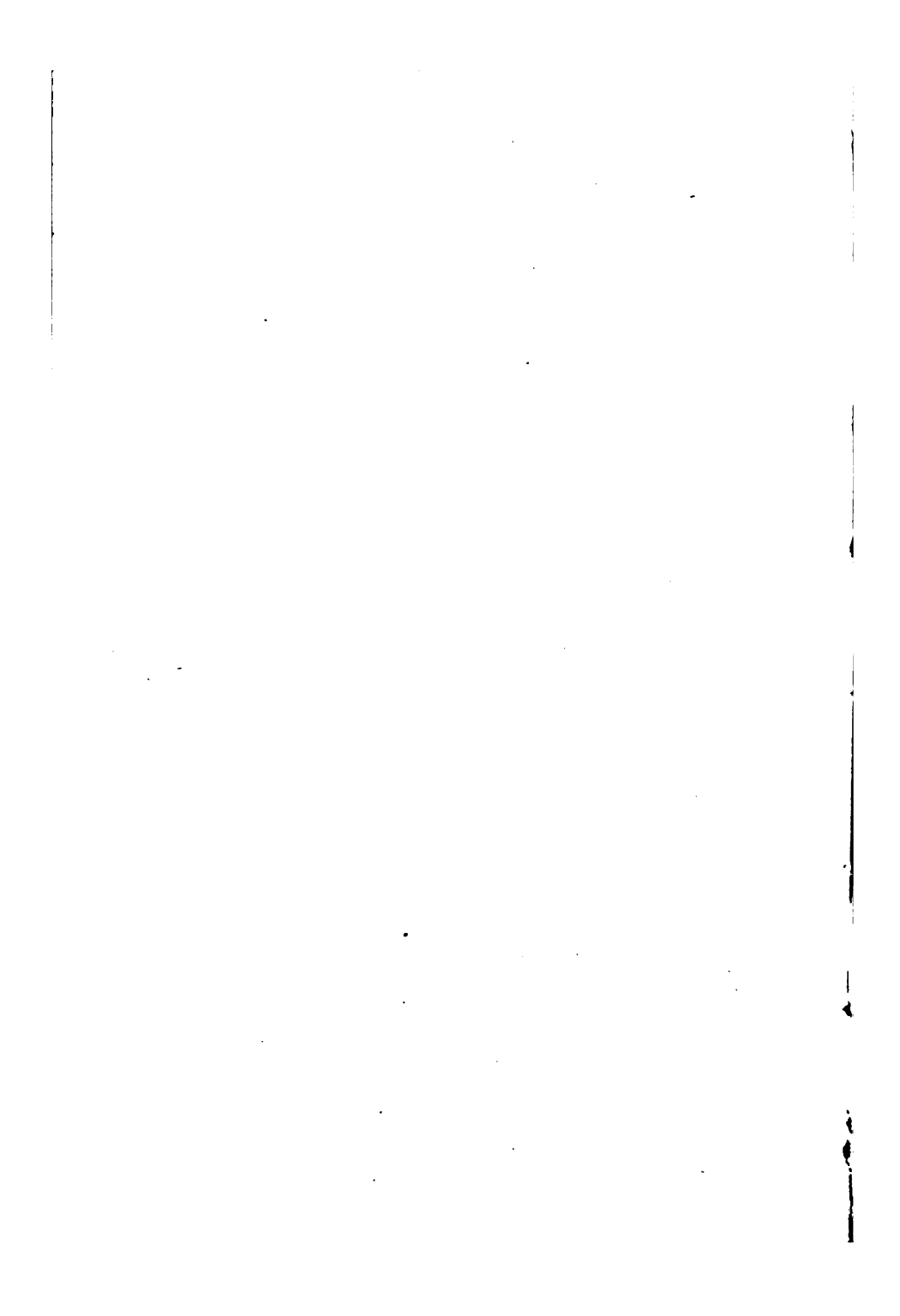
SHE. Vanity.

HE. Me too.

SHE. Well?

HE. Is it well?

[Her left hand suddenly dangles at her side. His right hand instantly pounces upon it. Baden-Baden is such a rippin' place!]



THE PRODIGAL PARENT

SCENE—*The library of 501 Eton Square, at half-past one in the morning.*

Mr John Ernest Turnchapel, watch in hand, is standing in front of the empty fireplace in a neat, prim and dignified suit of evening dress, wearing that curious look of unwilling conceit and humble self-importance peculiar to men who are at the same time Members of Parliament (on the wrong side), of the London County Council and the School Board for London.

For a quarter of an hour he stands motionless in an attitude of listening, wearing the expression on his rigidly clean-shaven face which most of us have seen, at one time or another, on the faces of our virtuous parents at a similar hour in the early morning. He is not, however, lying in wait for his son—for the excellent reason that he hasn't got one—but for his father, Admiral Sir Harry Turnchapel, K.C.M.G., G.C.B., who is up from Devonshire on a week's visit.

As the deeply-respectful clock carefully strikes the quarter, the sound of a key worrying a lock is heard, followed in quick succession by the sound of a brisk, heavy, good-natured step in the hall, of the thrusting of an evidently big-brimmed opera hat upon a shocked peg, and of a full, rich, clear, hearty voice humming, with a sense of time quite irresistible, an air from the ever-green San Toy.

SIR HARRY (*without*). "With his one little, two little, three little, four little—"

JOHN ERNEST (*calling*). Father!

SIR HARRY. "Five little, six little wives."

JOHN ERNEST (*again calling*). Father!

SIR HARRY (*coming towards the library*). "Kow tow, kow tow to the great Yen How, and wish him the—"

JOHN ERNEST (*going to the door*). Father!

SIR HARRY (*clapping both hands on his son's shoulders affectionately*). So, ho, dear chap. This is good. Thought you'd like to wait up for the ole Dad, hey? Thankee, boy, thankee. Pipe up the whisky and cigars.

JOHN ERNEST (*backing into the room coldly*). It is quite impossible for me to pipe up—whatever that may be—anything. The servants are all gone to bed.

SIR HARRY (*tumbling out of his overcoat*). What! Already?

JOHN ERNEST (*in a shocked L.C.C. manner*). Already? Are you aware what the time is?

SIR HARRY (*a little surprised*). Yes, certainly. Anything between ten and fifteen minutes to two. Why?

JOHN ERNEST (*simply throwing up his hands and eyebrows*). Why? Good gracious!

SIR HARRY (*clapping his son on the shoulder with a roar of laughter*). Ha! ha! Wait till you find yourself in town at the age of sixty-five, after a long spell of the country. You won't be tired by three o'clock in the morning, I warrant.

JOHN ERNEST (*with L.S.B. superiority*). Warrant is a word I never use, father.

SIR HARRY (*paying no attention to his son's remark*). By gad! but it's good once again to stick your legs under the old familiar table at the club, not too far from the fire, and look round at the faces of the men who've been through fire and water with you. It's good! And then, after an honest, square, plain club dinner, and a dip back into the old times again—Ha! ha! What days, be gad!—to mount a sound cigar and stroll forth into the night.

JOHN ERNEST (*tightening his lips*). Stroll!

SIR HARRY. How the old blood dances as you get into a rattling good hansom and spank through the well-lighted streets—being nearer to death than you ever

were before—gad! how they drive—to some theatre. Not, mind you, dear chap, to a place where you get cold shivers up and down the spine as you watch some horrid problem play, dealing with a few cads and bad women, but a nice, bright place where, from a comfortable seat, surrounded by happy, well-turned-out people, you can watch the glint of a pretty calf, hear the ring of a sweet voice, and shout yourself hoarse at the jokes of a dashed clever little actor.

JOHN ERNEST (*disgusted and alarmed*). Calf! Good gracious!

SIR HARRY. And then, with bits of tunes dancing in your brains, another hansom—more escapes—to supper. None of your dull, respectable places. But a place with a dashed good band, plenty of pretty women and well-set-up young fellows—sportsmen and gentlemen—laughter, the buzz of talk, and the quick report of champagne corks. Ha! ha! Why, the years drop off one's shoulders like dead leaves from a tree, the blood quickens, the joints ease, the memory gets clear; the heads of your old pals in arms, in love, in debt, in difficulties, in joy and sorrow, seem no longer bald. The crisp hair is there again, the old ring is in the laughter, the old devil in the eye. Lord! I'm not at all sure which is the most enjoyable—the living of your life, or the looking back upon it at the time when you

must be prepared to be told that the tide is turning and you are going out to sea. There is a glamour, a haze, round everything that you did and said which you never noticed at the time. The days had thirty-eight hours, and the sun shone all the year round. Every woman was an angel, every man a friend! But while you're living your life—

JOHN ERNEST (*coldly in a frozen mutton manner*). Excuse me, father, but I am not used to these recklessly late hours, nor am I—if you will forgive my mentioning it—quite in sympathy with you when you discuss your very wild and dissipated past.

SIR HARRY (*intensely amused*). Wild and dissipated! Oh, ho, ho! Look at me. Do I look as though I had led a wild and dissipated life? Feel my biceps. Not bad for sixty-five—what? At anyrate, they're good enough to fell a reasonable tree, account for our ninth hole—a regular corker with a spinney and a water bunker—in three, and send a blackguard into the middle of next week with—if necessary. Wild and dissipated! My good lad, my life was a healthy, active, breezy, and, I trust, not unuseful life; at anyrate, it was a man's life.

JOHN ERNEST (*stiffer than a poker*). There are men and men.

SIR HARRY (*banteringly*). Yes, and there are males and

she-males. I call yours the life of a she-male. Can you sail a boat? No. Can you drive in a nail or sew a button on your trousers? No. Do you travel in all climates and rub shoulders with all kinds of men? No. Can you play a sound game of whist, or poker, or roar out a rousing comic song? No. Can you chuck a man out of window, keep your temper with the Admiralty, and, at the right and proper moment, swear a donkey's hind-leg off? No, not for the life of you.

JOHN ERNEST (*involuntarily*). Good gracious!

SIR HARRY (*bursting with laughter*). Ho! ho! "good gracious." Yes, that *is* just about your mark.

JOHN ERNEST (*with the dignity of the L.C.C. and the L.S.B put together*). I would have you know, sir, that my life is—

SIR HARRY. My dear feller, I know what it is, and I pity you from the bottom of my heart. Be gad! just fancy *me* mewed up day after day, night after night in that blessed House, compelled to sit and listen to the ungrammatical twaddle of a pack of Radical and Irish rabble, which does neither the country nor themselves any credit. Conceive me herding with a set of illiterate Methodists, Socialists and other faddists, who are all yelling together on Education, a subject upon which two-thirds of 'em know nothing and care less. Imagine me—or any other *man*—consenting to touch with the

end of a barge-pole aitchless killjoys with nasty minds, of no intellect, whose one ambition is to reduce London to a state of morbid and suicidal depression. *Me! Ye gods. Ho! ho! Ha! ha! He! he! (He laughs until he goes off into a most enjoyable fit of slightly bronchial coughing.)*

JOHN ERNEST (*after a horrified pause, moving towards the door*). I fear it is too late, both in regard to the hour and your years, to argue with you upon your flippancy. But I shall be obliged if you will remember, during the remainder of your stay under my roof, that, when the House is not sitting, my bed-hour is half-past ten. I cannot have people driving up in hansom cabs in the small hours of the morning. What will people think? Besides, it is a great waste of electric light. And again (*he is rapidly working himself up to that exalted pitch of virtuous wrath which anyone who is foolish enough to take an interest in the doings of the London County Council and the London School Board cannot fail to have noticed in all their reports*)—and again, what would my enemies think of me if they were to go to the theatre and see my father there!

SIR HARRY (*whose face is distinctly red*). They would wonder, in all probability, what on earth a man of your father's build was doing with such a son as yourself. . . . Thankee, kindly, for your hospitality. Get

to your bed, my good son. And in the morning take a strong dose of powder, labelled "Sense of Humour," in half a tumbler of water, mount a hack and ride out somewhere at the hardest trot you know. Then come home, jump into a cold bath, send in your resignation to those damned institutions, and go horse-racing for a year or two. That'll broaden you out a bit and get rid of those theories of yours. . . . Good-night, old chap. Turn out your precious light. Your prodigal parent hasn't the least objection to finishing his cigar in the dark.

OLD DEPARTMENT FOR NEW PEERS

SCENE—*Lyminge House, Piccadilly, which, as everybody knows, is the historic town house of the Duke of Canterbury, purchased recently from the Americans by Mr Thomas Snoddy, the sole proprietor of Snoddy's famous "Little Johnnie Bilious Pills" (trade mark, "Snoddy in the waistcoat pocket"), and presented by him to the Young Duke as a wedding present on the occasion of his marriage with Miss Victoria Ermyntrude Snoddy.*

Mr Snoddy, a magnificent specimen of an aristocratic Englishman, as shown to us by the two or three fine old crusted butlers who are still extant, is seated by the fire in the morning-room, looking over the top of the Times at "my daughter, the Duchess" with a look of pride and self-congratulation.

The Young Duchess, who is generally described by the female paragraphist as so sweet and willowy in grey, or black, or pink, as the case may be, is eagerly hunting in the columns of a weekly paper for some reference to herself. Quite by accident she is seated

beneath the full-length portrait in oils of the fourth Duchess, a woman of the bedchamber of Queen Elizabeth of blessed memory, who, as is quite natural under the circumstances, is regarding her with a cold, indignant stare over a scaffolding of starched ruffle.

The incessant rumble of traffic, the frequent, painful ejaculations of motor-cars, the shrill, persistent yell of paper-boys come faintly into the room from without. From the smoking-room, which opens out of the room in which father and daughter are seated, drifts the cheerful if somewhat untuneful voice of "my son-in-law, his Grace," raised in song.

MR SNODDY (*with deferential familiarity*). Er—and now, dearie, what are your Grace's movements for the day?

THE YOUNG DUCHESS (*languidly*). I see in the *Morning Post*, papa, that I am opening a Bazaar to provide funds to endow Cottage Homes for Dismissed Generals at twelve, and—

THE YOUNG DUKE.

" . . . mighty badly,
Ah'm a longin' for yer daily
'Cos ah lub yer mighty madly,
So come back to please me
Don't try for to tease me,
'Cos ah . . . "

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MR SNODDY (*with subdued irritation*). If his Grace feels compelled to give voice to anything, why not a classical song? "My mother bids me bind my hair," or "Alice, where art thou?" or something Italian, perhaps, such as one expects in a Duke. These ribald things—

THE YOUNG DUCHESS (*quietly*). My dear papa, *we* only go in for those ribald things just now.

MR SNODDY (*beating time with his fingers*). Ah, indeed! That, of course, alters the whole case. Yes, it's—er—it's quite a—a springy air, quite. You were saying?

THE YOUNG DUCHESS. And that after lunch I am attending the meeting of English noblewomen at St James's Hall to discuss the measure to be taken to fight the Trust organised by American women for the purchase of English noblemen for connubial purposes.

THE YOUNG DUKE (*with much feeling*).

" . . . An' de birds am a dreamin',
Den ah wants yer, ma honey, yeth, I do,
Fer ah lub yer ebery minut',
An' nobody elth ith in ut,
An' my heart is for ever . . ."

THE YOUNG DUCHESS. And then I see I am having tea with the Royal Society of Pavement Artists at their New Club in Cheyne Walk, and dining with my aunt-in-law in her motor-Pullman, which is to pick me up at the corner of Stratton Street at eight o'clock.

MR SNODDY (*admiration oozing out of every pore*). And whereabouts on the road do you actually dine?

THE YOUNG DUCHESS (*with superb insouciance*). Oh, on the front at Brighton.

MR SNODDY (*with a gasp*). B—Brighton?

THE YOUNG DUCHESS. Yes, papa. We shall be anchored outside Mrs Barnato's house at twenty-two minutes past eight.

MR SNODDY (*involuntarily*). Great Scott!—or, rather, dear me!

THE YOUNG DUCHESS. If we should ever be surprised into being surprised, the word we use just now is Gorbliney. I haven't the faintest idea what it means. It was, however, introduced by Lord Misterton, when he came back from the front. (*He laughs.*) How stupid it sounds, "back from the front," don't it?

THE YOUNG DUKE.

"'Cos ah want, ma honey,
Yes, ah want yer, want yer, want yer.
'Cos ah want yer—

[*He suddenly breaks off, and goes into a fit of laughter, and apparently rolls about the room.*]

MR SNODDY. Oh, Lord Misterton introduced it, did he? The private soldier from whom he got it was,

doubtless, at one time at work in my factory. It is also a very fashionable expression there.

THE YOUNG DUKE (*rushing suddenly into the room, with a copy of a theatrical paper, in a wild state of excitement*). I say, Snoddy.

MR SNODDY (*rising*). Can I be of any—

THE YOUNG DUKE. Oh, I say, sir; do excuse my calling you Snoddy in that tone of voice. It does sound so doocid like a nickname, don't it? But the thing is, what *am* I to call you? Oh, by gad! an inspiration. What about calling you pa—what?

MR SNODDY (*beaming*). I shall be simply deligh—

THE YOUNG DUKE. Good. Well, look here, pa dear. I'm simply full of happy—flowin' over! What d'yer think *I've* found—eh, what? Ha! ha! I was on it like a *bee*—a reg'lar *bumble*. They all say I'm no good; can't earn a bob, and all that. Perfectly right, perfectly—so far. Been livin' on nothin' up till you married me—I mean Vicky clawed on—oh, *you* know—but look here, look what I've spotted. Wot ho, she misses the step! Listen. (*He reads aloud in a voice filled with boyish excitement.*) "Wanted: Known Genuine Elizabethan Peer to teach those of recent creation how to pass, at the forthcoming Coronation, as quite old-established members of the Uppermost Ten. Write, in first instance, stating pedigree, date of creation, and salary

required, to Secretary, Heralds' Office, London." Eh, what? About my mark, eh? Isn't it spiffin'! Think of me earnin' money by the sweat of my brow!

MR SNODDY (*who, like all business men, had put on his spectacles the better to hear every word*). Yes, it would be a change. But why is the advertisement in a theatrical paper?

THE YOUNG DUKE (*gaily*). Why? Oh, pa dear! where *is* your knowledge of the world? Because all the Elizabethan Peers have been driven to become actors, of course.

THE YOUNG DUCHESS (*with consummate quietude*). My dear Canty, don't call them actors. That's unkind. Merely say they have gone on the stage.

MR SNODDY. Yes. Well, your Grace—

THE YOUNG DUKE (*squirming*). I say, pa, if you love me, chuck the Grace part of the business.

MR SNODDY (*almost unmanned*). Y-yes; b-but—

THE YOUNG DUKE. Call me Canty, or Berry, or Spoof, or Soccer, or any of my nicknames. I'm not jokin', sir, but on my word of honour as—as—as—ha! ha!—a genuine Elizabethan Peer, when anybody—anybody bar a valet—calls me *that*, it gives me the nettle-rash horribly. That's all right, then. Now we can go ahead.

MR SNODDY (*mastering his emotion bravely*). Well, I

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was about to say, my dear Canty-Spoof — Berry-Soccer—

THE YOUNG DUKE (*delighted*). Ha! ha! Played indeed!

MR SNODDY. I was trying to say, Canterbury—er, my dear Duke—that although, of course, there is no one in the British Empire more suited to teach deportment—

THE YOUNG DUKE. Eleven to ten on Deportment.

MR SNODDY. Than yourself, I see no reason why you should be so anxious to earn a salary. My dear Duke, let me go on. I have made a great deal of money, and I do not grudge letting you and my dear daughter spend it. One minute. On the contrary. It gives me infinite satisfaction to have had the privilege of being allowed to rescue this ancient house from American hands and restore it to its rightful owner.

THE YOUNG DUKE. I know. You're just a Briton. But—

MR SNODDY (*with a dignified smile*). There is, I assure you, no snobbishness about me in this, but merely genuine personal delight and a feeling of patronism.

THE YOUNG DUKE (*not unmoved*). Pa! Britons never never—what? Yes, and it's a doocid delicate way of putting it, too. Thanks awfully. But if you don't mind, just this once, as a sort of sop to my conscience, I should most awfully like to earn this money,

MR SNODDY. My dear boy—

THE YOUNG DUKE. You don't mind? Bravo! Besides, O pa, *think*, just *think*, what a lovely time I shall have with these mushrooms. Teach 'em to pass as old-established members? Oh, won't I, that's all? Leave it to me. I'll dash off and write my letter of application. I say, Vicky, old gel, tell yer what: I'll stand yer a seal-skin coat with the proceeds. What jokes! (*He rushes to the door, and turns with a burst of laughter.*) I say, pa, I never could forget the days of Queen Elizabeth.

[*He kisses his hand to his wife, bolts out and bangs the door. Time, and newspaper reporters alone, will tell how far he succeeded in his mission.*]

THE INCESSANT NIGHTINGALE

THE scene is laid at the Court of Tararaboomderania, one of those salubrious countries recently discovered by Mr Anthony Hope, and since desperately overrun by tripper-novelists on the Friday until Tuesday system.

Because the Incomparable Princess Hypatia has commanded an extraordinary meeting of her ministers in the Throne Room, the small garden running round the left-hand side of the Palace, which is semi-detached, is thronged with the eleven reporters on the staffs of the eleven papers (whose circulations are naturally the largest in the world) which provide the three hundred inhabitants of the principality, most of whom are fortunately unable to read, with utterly untrustworthy information.

From the bow window of the Throne Room a tall sentry, dressed in some of the uniform of an officer in His

Majesty the King of England's Household Cavalry, and some of the uniform of an admiral of His Britannic Majesty's Navy, can be seen strolling up and down by the big gates, puffing complacently at a nasty cigarette which has been supplied to him by an American firm gratis, for the sake of the advertisement.

As the Town Hall clock strikes twelve, a polite Conservative cheer mixes with an anæmic Liberal hoot, hurried steps are heard in the passage, the Throne Room door opens, and the incomparable Hypatia's ministers enter in quick succession.

The first to enter is the Prime Minister, who is also Home Secretary, Colonial Secretary, Master-Barber, Leader of the Orchestra, Postmaster and Punch Brewer. He was, it is generally believed, an Englishman before he became a naturalised Tarara-boomderanian, who travelled with a circus in the capacity of clown. He is called Count Arrygiggins, and is a very popular speaker. He is followed by the Lord Chamberlain, who is also the Archbishop, Master of the Wardrobe, Leading Man at the State Theatre, Harbour Master, Dancing Master, Turncock, and Herald. This gentleman, who says that he is

himself a descendant of Kings, is supposed to have been a prominent member, according to himself, of the Irish Nationalist Party in the House of Commons of Great Britain. His name is Count O'Flanagan, and he is extremely popular with the ladies. The third and last to arrive is the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces, who is also Admiral of the Fleet, Inspector of Nuisances, Chief Constable, Teacher of Bridge, Professor of Ping-pong, Master of Deportment and Chef-in-Chief. This gentleman is a Parisian who, at one time, endeavoured to become Emperor of the French, and who, it is reported, would have succeeded but for the appearance of an exceedingly clever caricature in *Le Petit Journal*, which, at a crucial moment, set his supporters off into fits of laughter. His name is Count Rochecourt.

There is a look upon the highly characteristic faces of these right honourable gentlemen of alarm, and, to employ a word which is quite unknown to Englishmen, "funk."

COUNT ARRYGIGINS (*from force of habit*). 'Ere we are agin.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*hiding a cutty pipe up the sleeve of his dilapidated Court uniform*). Whirroo, me bhoys,

but it's mesself that's afther thinkin' it's an onpleasant quarter of an hour we shall be spendin' this blessed mornin'—divil fly away wid ut!

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*flinging up both hands and wagging all his fingers*). Ah! nom de théâtre, vat you mean, vat you 'int?

COUNT ARRYGIGINS. 'Int? Mong chere freer, there ain't much 'intin' done by our 'onerable frien' O'Flanagin. You 'aven't seen the leader in the *Daily Scream*, that's jolly certain.

COUNT ROCHECOURT. No, I 'ave not. I cook ze breakfass of ze Princess, I inspect ze army, I put anozer jacket of paint on ze Royal punt, I repair ze racquet of Ping-pong—I 'ave no time for read.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*drawing the Commander-in-Chief nearer and reading from a copy of the Tararaboomderanian great Liberal organ with the largest circulation of any Liberal newspaper in the world*). "The Ministry, the rottenest, most puerile, most illiterate, most effete this country has ever known, is doomed! It is crawling to the grave it has dug for itself. We rejoice exceedingly. Ten weeks ago the Incomparable Princess commanded the Ministry to obtain for her an Incessant Nightingale, a nightingale which should never stop singing day in day out. The fact of this command being an entirely feminine one, no such animal existing in any part of

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the world, does not for an instant exonerate the Ministry from the blame of having failed. If a Liberal Ministry had been requested—" Oh, the divil. As if ut 'ud make ony difference at all. You and me's more Liberal than ony Liberal, although we're Conservative.

COUNT ROCHECOURT. But yes! But ze bird; we cannot produce ze bird.

COUNT ARRYIGGINS (*whining*). Well, we've done our best and failed, and there's an end of it. After all, it's only the foolish whim of a woman.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*at the top of his voice*). Is ut? Are ye afther forgetting the last whim she tuk into her head? It wasn't gratified, and accordingly the population was reduced, by hanging, from five to three hundred!

COUNT ARRYIGGINS. But we ain't the population. You don't mean—

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*beginning to tremble*). Is eet possible zat you tink—

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. Oh, whirroo, whirroo, I dunno what ut is I'm afther thinkin'. *They* were hanged anyway. The Princess, God bless her, is the very divil pwhin roused and— Look out, here she comes.

[The Sentry we noticed lolling at the gates, who constitutes in himself the whole army of Tarara-

boomderania, flings open the state door with an ease born of long practice and an innate sense of pomp, puts down an old-fashioned gold-rimmed naval telescope, draws his sword, and bellows at the top of his voice, which belongs to no marked nationality—"Her Highness the Incomparable Princess Hypatia."

The Ministry bows profoundly, and there is a pause.

With a smile of exquisite condescension, in which there is just the least suspicion of amusement, the Incomparable Hypatia moves gracefully to her Throne, followed by the Lady of the Bed-chamber, who is also Maid of Honour, Mistress of the Wardrobe, Lady-in-Waiting and Sole Chaperon. Mr Anthony Hope, it is said, has never actually described this particular princess, who is quite the most beautiful woman it is possible to conceive. There is, as a matter of fact, nothing remarkable about her individual features. Her eyes are just eyes, her nose is a nose and nothing else, while the shape of her face, her ears, her mouth, and her teeth, fulfil their respective rôles, to use a *cliché* of the more hardened dramatic

critic, "quite adequately." She is, notwithstanding, very different from other women in that everything upon her is her own. Consequently, there is about her a freshness, a naturalness, an open-airness which is as charming as it is singular. Quite the opposite may be said in regard to the Countess Marianna. Her ladyship is a personage of the greatest outward distinction. Her features are exquisitely chiselled, the bridge of her nose in itself eloquently declaring that her family has spanned at least a thousand years. But there is a falsity so palpable about her "front" and her "tails," her immovably arched eyebrows, her thickly-caked lips, her flashing teeth, a whiteness so white, a pinkness so pink, about her complexion, as to render her exactly like every other woman of her own and every other country.

Not until an American automatic machine has finished the last note of "Tararaboomdeay," the local National Anthem, does the Ministry straighten its back.]

THE PRINCESS (*with delicious grace*). My Lords, you may be seated.

COUNT ARRYGIGINS (*clumsily*). Thankee kindly, Your 'Ighness; (*inwardly*) Wot ho, 'ware squalls.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*with a certain style*). Your Highness's obeejent servant; (*inwardly*) O whirroo, that smoil.

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*with perfect ease and grace*). Madame La Princesse; (*inwardly*) Ah, nom de plume ! Il n'y a pas à dire !

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*putting her elbows on the arms of the Throne, the tips of the fingers of her right hand against the tips of the fingers of her left hand, and looking at her uneasy advisers under her eyelashes*). And so, my Lords, notwithstanding the difficulty my subjects have loyally been endeavouring to overcome in the search for the Incessant Nightingale, notwithstanding the great anxiety, the fear of my wrath, which has been clutching at the hearts of everyone, you, my ministers, my advisers, who are well paid, and in whom is reposed my confidence, you have been emulating, if one may believe all one hears, the example of the Ministry of my noble contemporary the King of England, whose country is also labouring under momentary difficulties, and have been playing golf while the people wrote letters to the Press.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. Your Highness, if you'll be afther remembering the state of me liver—

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*holding up her hand*). My Lord,

I gave you no permission to address the Throne. If it is true that you were only one of a large body of men of similar nationality who sat in the Commons of the little island to the nor'-nor'-east it is no wonder that I have heard that House described as a bear garden in Pandemonium.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*with a smile of rare enjoyment*)
Divil a bit av wonder at all, your Highness! That's the reason we go there. Ho! ho!

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*with a rising and most becoming colour*). Golfing—that game played by ancient Scots for the encouragement of a thirst—golfing, while every man, woman and child in my country, with the exception of my Army and Navy, who was on guard duty at my Palace, was searching high and low to gratify the latest whim of their Princess. I am not in sympathy with the biceptic, eight-oared language of that excitable paper, the *Daily Scream*. University rowing men, as editors, have so little sense of humour; but unless, as the *Flag* has very unkindly and persistently stated, you have been holding secret Cabinet Councils, while playing golf, to give the public confidence—unless you are able to show me that you have accomplished something, that you have, in point of fact, found the Incessant Nightingale, I shall deal with you as having shown the greatest neglect of your important duties and the most supreme

contempt for the wishes and the well-being of your Sovereign. My lords, what have you to say?

COUNT ARRYIGGINS (*rising*). Your 'Ighness, it's puffedly orl right. In five min—

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*jumping to his feet*). If your Highness will be afther listenin', I can explain—

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*dancing on a sixpence*). Madame la Princesse, in one, two, tree minute, I vill tell you vat eet is zat I—

PRINCESS HYPATIA. One at a time, if you please, my Lords. This is not, although you seem to think so, an English park on a Sunday afternoon. Count Arryiggins, let me hear you first.

COUNT ARRYIGGINS (*plucking at the gold braid on his Court uniform*). Your 'Ighness, my lords, ladies and gents all—I beg pardon, there ain't no gentlemen 'ere. Er—my lords and (*with a nervous smirk at the Countess Marianna*) my lady. Er—unaccustomed as I—I am—er—to—to public speakin'—

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*with a more dangerous smile*). My Lord Count Arryiggins seems to fancy that he is back in his own small but notorious country making an after-dinner speech at a meeting of Masons. Be seated, Count. Perhaps the Commander-in-Chief of the Forces will be good enough to explain.

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*in a fever of self-righteous excite-*

ment). Madame il n'y a point de chemin trop long à qui marche lentement et sans se presser, il n'y a point d'avantages trop éloignés à qui s'y prépare par la—

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*lifting her hand*). The Count Rochecourt forgets that I was educated at an English school where French was the special subject, and that, therefore, I know nothing of his language.

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*with a fleeting frightened smile*). Madame, ten thousand pardon. It ees no matter. Ven I speak ze Ingleesh I am ver often mistook for a natife. Madame, touching zis Incess Nightingale—

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*beginning to tap her foot*). Count O'Flanagan, my Commander-in-Chief, and my Prime Minister cannot account for themselves either to their own or to my satisfaction. It therefore rests with you to explain why you played golf in a crisis like the present.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*rising with a gesture of Galway dignity*). Ut is to yez Lord Chamberlain that your Highness shud always be afther turnin' in moments of importance. I will therefore take up the full and complete explanation which me colleagues have so eloquently left unsaid, and carry ut to a thorough and happy termination. Ten days ago, at a Cabinet Council held in this historic and ancient

Palace, so recently constructed by an English jerry-builder, your Highness wisely thought fit—for no reason whatever, so far as ony livin' soul cud see—to set her moind upon a bird, a nightingale which should never cease its song—bad cess to ut.

“Ours not to reason why,
Ours but to do or die,”

as me friend Tennyson used sportively to say whilst playin' a little game at poker in my castle in the dear ould country. Your Highness, with the abject of “doin' or dyin'” in view, me fellow Ministers and meself sat the machinery of this powerful yet simple kingdom at motion. Your entire police force was hastily despatched in one direction, with enough food to last him for three days; your whole postal establishment was told to leave his letters alone and go in another; your complete stable, mounted upon all your horses, dashed forward as fast as a knock-kneed pony, ridden by a short-sighted old man, could. In short, no stone was left unturned. With vivid recollection of your last little hangin' pleasantries, men, women and children left their work to hunt for this Incessant Nightingale; and, although me and me colleagues knew the thing wasn't in existence, we religiously served everybody with so much bird lime

and a certain quantity of salt to put on its tail whenever they cud get near enough to do so. Your Highness, *in* sayin' that the Ministry went golfin' at this same time in order to inspire the country with confidence, the *Flag* is right for the first time since its inception. Is ut likely that a patriotic Irishman, a loyal Englishman, a devoted Frenchman—who are in this da—delightful spot merely for love of their respective countries—would be seen by decent-livin' people playin' a *Scotch* game for *fun*? I ask y' Highness, is ut? And before you've formulated a reply I take it out of Your Highness's mouth. No!

THE PRINCESS (*whose feet are both tapping, though there is a smile on her lips*). I thank you, Count O'Flanagan for your inspired oration. The only question to which I need an answer is: Where is the Incessant Nightingale?

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*excitedly, quite in his old Parliamentary manner*). Sure, an' haven't I been after showin' your Highness that the animal has been as good as found since it has been found that ut doesn't exist at all?

THE PRINCESS (*with superb dignity*). Count O'Flanagan, I beg that you will be seated. My Lords, I had made up my mind before attending this Cabinet

Council this morning, that, if the bird upon which I have set my heart should not be pouring forth its song from a cage upon the window-sill, I should mark my displeasure with you at your failure by commanding your execution by hanging.

COUNT ARRYIGGINS. O! my 'at!

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. The divil!

COUNT ROCHECOURT. Nom de théâtre!

THE PRINCESS. I see no reason, my Lords, why I should alter my mind. (*The three agitated men of nimble wits all begin to talk together.*) One moment. As the occasion will be a slightly unusual one—I do not remember in the history of the world to have read of the hanging of any other Ministry—I shall be glad if you will be so good as to issue a proclamation stating in bold type, in good clear English—I will correct the spelling in the proof—the circumstances of the case, and notify that the day of execution will be celebrated throughout my kingdom by the observance of a public holiday, and I hereby appoint the day after to-morrow, as my new frock will then certainly be ready. My Lords, I wish you a very good morning.

COUNT ARRYIGGINS. But, your 'Ighness, it's—it's impossible. It isn't civilised.

THE PRINCESS (*rising gracefully*). According to the definition of the word as known to your country, perhaps

not. Judging from what I have seen in copies of several Boer papers published daily in London, I gather that there is a certain section of people in the East End of that city which would rejoice if your country were in as high a state of civilisation as mine is.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. Yes, but is ut wise, your Highness? Think pwhat the Tararaboomderanian Press will say.

THE PRINCESS. My Lord, I am the only ruler in the world who is not ruled by the Press. Unlike any other leading actor, I never read dramatic criticisms.

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*theatrically*). France will be re-vengeed!

THE PRINCESS. I am not afraid to meet any European Power, my Lord. I alone can boast of an army which is mobile and a navy whose ships never crumple. My Lords, I again wish you good morning.

[The incomparable Princess, escorted by her blushing Army-Navy, slowly, and with superb dignity, leaves the Throne Room. She is followed by the Countess Marianna, who, turning at the door, looks back upon the white, trembling men with a pure Glasgow smile, saying, "An serve ye well richt, ma braw bonnie cronies. I'd have ye ken that because gowf encourages a thirst it's

a richt royal an' ancient game!" The door closes.

Ten minutes later the silence in the Throne Room is broken by the entrance of the maid-of-all-work, carrying a visiting-card in her apron-covered hand. She finds the Frenchman in a passion of tears among strips of his clothes; the Irishman, with a black smile upon his lips, drawing, on the dust on the window, the figure of an English policeman winking at a tall gentleman with a buttonhole and an eyeglass. The Englishman is standing with his back against the wall, with arms folded, with bright eyes, and with a look of grim pride about his bulldog mouth.

The little smudgy maid looks from one to another with characteristic curiosity, and then holds the card under Count Aryiggins's nose, who is much too occupied in thinking of his attitude to take any notice.]

THE LITTLE SMUDGY MAID. 'Ere, tike it, can't yer?
COUNT ARYIGGINS (*with a start*). Wot? A card?
Who is it?

THE LITTLE SMUDGY MAID. Ah dunno.

COUNT ARYIGGINS (*reading*). "The Honourable

Eustace John Bitton Gosburton, Bachelors' Club." Show 'im up instanter! (*The maid runs.*) A sail! A sail!

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*with contempt*). Phwat the devil is ut yez afther talkin' about now?

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*through his sobs*). V—v—vat ees a s—s—sail?

COUNT ARRYIGGINS (*impatiently, with barely-suppressed excitement*). I was speakin' metaphorical. At the moment of our hutmost need an Englishman arrives, and when an Englishman arrives, as you jolly well know, both of you, the situation is saved.

COUNT ROCHECOURT. Ef my neck did not already feel ver susceptible, I should carry "Fashoda!"

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*drily*). An' I, too, cud be afther sayin' a thing or two, but phwat's the good whin it won't be reported in full?

[The door is opened, and an extremely well-groomed, good-looking, clean-shaven, youngish man, with his hair brushed straight back from his forehead and parted in the centre, a shrewd eye, a mouth which continually changes its expression, and a light, breezy, familiar-distant manner, enters slowly.]

COUNT ARRYIGGINS (*wildly excited and making a dash*

at him). 'Ooray! Briton's never, never, never. 'Ow are yer, old chap?

GOSBURTON (*looking at him with amused astonishment*). How de do? Er—can I see one of the Ministers of this whatsitsname?

COUNT ARRYGIGINS. Your 'umble, old man.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*airily*). At y' service, me dear sor.

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*bowing profoundly*). I—I am ze Minister.

GOSBURTON (*amazed in a quite comfortable manner*). No! Bar chaff? Well, I'm hanged. Forgive my only too obvious astonishment. I have read various books, and seen several plays dealing with these off-the-map kind of countries, and the Ministers in them were invariably well-set-up beggars in German military uniforms, with fierce white moustaches and high-heeled boots. However, pray don't apologise. I fancy I shall find you quite pleasant people enough. What?

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*who is the first to recover his breath*). And pray why is ut that yez afther comin' here, at all? Till me that.

GOSBURTON (*sitting down on the Throne*). Well, not to go into minute details, there were reasons why I should take a pretty long holiday away from town, and on my way to nowhere in particular I stumbled on this queer little hole with the music-hall name, and, seeing a kind

of proclamation on the hoardings round the village pump, I read it and thought it wouldn't be a bad idea to find that nightingale.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN (*eagerly*). An' have yez?

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*intensely*). Ah, kevick, kevick!

COUNT ARRYGIGINS (*anxiously*). Have you got 'im?

GOSBURTON (*lighting a cigarette*). Don't be an idiot. Of course I haven't. (*There is a united groan from the ex-Ministry*). There is no such bird in the world. You don't mean to say you've been taking the whim of a mere woman seriously?

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. So seriously that the Princess has, barely ten minutes ago, sentenced the three of us to death.

GOSBURTON. No! Bravo, Princess Hypatia! I like a thorough-going woman. Ha, ha! But I can't believe that you understand women so little as not to provide her with a substitute which you can easily persuade her is a thousand times better than the thing she sets her mind on. It's because men know that in England—the first rule in married life—there's so little divorce. However, for goodness' sake, don't pull those lengthy faces. It's all right, believe me.

COUNT ARRYGIGINS. But you may be mistook. You've never been married?

GOSBURTON (*sententiously*). My dear man, to understand that all women are hypocrites it is not necessary to have been married.

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. But, me dear sor, we daren't be afther telling the Princess that a substitute is a thousand times better than the thing she sets her mind on.

GOSBURTON. Of course not. Nothing annoys a woman so much as to be told the truth. That's why all men are liars. I left a cage in a green baize cover outside the door. May I trouble one of you to fetch it for me?

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. It's a pleasure. (*He goes quickly and, with something of hope in his step, brings in the cage, and gives it to Eustace Gosburton with a flourish peculiarly Galwegian*).

GOSBURTON (*blowing a cloud of tobacco smoke*). Now look here, you people. I take it you are willing to go even to disreputable lengths of diplomacy to save your necks. Eh, what?

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. We are that.

COUNT ARRYIGGINS. Wot do *you* think?

COUNT ROCHECOURT. Deeplomacé? Ah! ha! On connaît les amis au besoin!

GOSBURTON. I haven't the least idea what you mean, but I've no doubt that what you say is very true. It

will, then, be absolutely necessary that you should, without any argument, do everything that I tell you. (*He goes to the wall opposite the window and taps it. Several bricks fall.*) Good. There is no need to tell me that this—palace, don't you call it?—was built by one of the English firms who erect flats on the while-you-wait system. There is, I take it, a passage behind this wall. What?

COUNT O'FLANAGAN. True for you, sor.

GOSBURTON. I won't say "I told you so," because if I do you will think I'm a kind of imitation of that ingenuous person, Sherlock Holmes. Good. Then will one of you please hang this cage about an inch from the ceiling? Don't use a long nail, because it won't look well to see it sticking out on the other side. (*The cage is placed*). That's excellent. The Princess won't be able to see that it's merely a sparrow. Now, just call up as many boys as there are in the place, and tell them to stand in the passage behind the wall with tumblers of water. Give each boy one of these tubes, and give them strict orders that when the first one is tired of blowing the tube in the water, another one must instantly begin to blow.

COUNT ARRYIGGINS (*slapping his knees, with a roar of laughter*). Bird whistles for a dollar.

GOSBURTON. No, sixpence each. Do you understand?

Soon the palace will be filled with the exquisite note of the nightingale, the Princess will come running in, most frightfully surprised. You will then present me—don't forget that the accent is on the first syllable of my surname, please—and retire out of hearing.

[Count O'Flanagan had already left the room some seconds. From behind the wall there first come sounds of shuffling feet, clearing throats, young giggles, and green Irish oaths. Then the gurgling notes of an amateur nightingale, and finally the full throaty, luscious song of an old professional bird.]

COUNT ARRYIGGINS (*delighted*). Wot ho !

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*clasping Gosburton's hands tenderly with tears in his eyes*). Ah, M'sieu, mais vous êtes venu comme Mars en Carême !

GOSBURTON. 'Tis rather good. What? In London they have those things blown in the wings of the theatres where Shakespeare is being acted. They call it the Real Pump. Don't ask me why. I never go to theatres where they play Shakespeare. I prefer to see pieces in which actors and actresses have no difficulty in pronouncing their words.

[The door flies open, and the Incomparable Princess,

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with a look of intense, almost frightened, astonishment, rushes in.]

THE PRINCESS. What is this? It cannot—it cannot be—

COUNT ROCHECOURT (*pointing his toe and his finger at the cage with elegance and athleticism.*) Zee Incess Nightingale, Madame—Voilà!

COUNT ARRYGIGINS (*sticking his thumb in his waistcoat*). Allow me to introduce the Hon. Eustace John Bitton Gosburton, of the Zoo, Regent's Park, and the Bachelors' Club, which is the West-End Branch of the same establishment.

THE PRINCESS (*instinctively running her fingers through her fringe*). Oh! and you have heard so far away as that of my desire for an Incessant Nightingale, and you have troubled to come all this way?

GOSBURTON (*thinking that it was quite worth while*). —How de do! Delighted, I'm sure.

THE PRINCESS (*running quickly to the wall in order to hide an overwhelming blush*). Oh! You darling thing. An' didsums widsums ting all de time, den? Oh, you dear! Sweet! sweet! sweeeeet!

[While her back is turned Gosburton signals to the three delighted Ministers to retire into the bow

window. With many quite unnecessary and exceedingly vulgar winks they do so. The Princess comes slowly back and sits down upon her throne. Count O'Flanagan notices, with great joy, that she looks at the Englishman, and seems to take no further interest in the bird.]

GOSBURTON (*to break the ice*). May I ask, Princess, whether this place was discovered by a writing chap or a variety artist?

THE PRINCESS (*following her own train of thought in a quite feminine manner*). And you come all the way from Regent's Park, which, I have heard, is itself forty minutes' drive from civilisation! How good of you, sir.

GOSBURTON. Pray don't mention it. I always was a bit of a rover.

THE PRINCESS. And how did you come?

GOSBURTON. By motor, until I got sick of lying under it on my back in the middle of the road, and then towed the beastly thing.

THE PRINCESS. And how did you leave England?

GOSBURTON (*with a queer little laugh*). In rather a hurry.

THE PRINCESS. No. I mean in what state? I have had no first-hand news for two years.

GOSBURTON. Oh, I beg your pardon. Well, in pretty much the same state as it was two years ago. The war was still going on. The Conservatives were still smiling placidly and keeping their livers active with mild exercise, while the younger members of the party who long for notoriety were still making silly little rude speeches and writing melodramatic letters full of raised eyebrows to the *Times*; and the Opposition, hopelessly divided, watched between the bouts of their quarrelling a middle-aged little Scots gentleman trying to pull his feet out of a furrow. He never will, of course. He is like an inexpensive squib. He makes quite a lot of noise for threepence, and then fizzles out, and the stick falls harmlessly into his own garden. Christmas was on when I left, and there was a pantomime at every West-End theatre—problem pantomimes, costume pantomimes, military pantomimes, drawing-room pantomimes, detective pantomimes, and music-hall pantomimes. When it wasn't foggy it rained, and nearly every street one was obliged to go down was up. The first number of a new weekly paper came out the day I left. Yes, everything just the same. The bird is not making too much noise for you?

THE PRINCESS. The bird? What bird? Oh, the nightingale. Oh, no; thanks very much. That reminds me—(*She looks a little uncomfortable, although a delicious*

smile creeps round the corner of her mouth). You know, don't you, that the person who discovered the bird can claim the title of Prince?

GOSBURTON. No, I didn't. But—er—By Jove, don't you know, what fun!

THE PRINCESS. Fun?

GOSBURTON. I mean to say, er—how delightful. Thanks awfully; I claim it with much pleasure.

[He raises her hand to his lips. There is a sudden noise of a penny rattling in and out of something equally metallic, a rasping sound, a kind of gasp, and "Tararaboomdeay" comes with deadly precision from the American slot machine.]

GOSBURTON (*starting uneasily*). Good lor', what's that dashed row?

THE PRINCESS (*with a smile*). That, Prince Eustace, is our National Anthem.

GOSBURTON (*doubling up*). Prince? Ho, ho! Eustace. He, he! National? Ha, ha! Anthem? Haw, haw!

[There is a sudden dump upon the floor, followed by a loud cry from the Ministers. The Prince and Princess turn round. The cage has fallen from its

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nail and has torn a large piece of wall down with it. The bird is dead, although the air is still filled with the exquisite notes of a nightingale.]

THE PRINCESS (*looking from Gosburton's amused face to the distracted faces of her Ministers*). Tricked! Tricked!

GOSBURTON. My dear lady—

THE PRINCESS (*beside herself with rage*). Don't touch me. I will never speak to you again as long as I live. You shall join my Ministers upon the gallows.

[She throws herself into her Throne and bursts into a passion of tears. Gosburton beckons to the shivering ex-convicts, airily gives the first one a direction, keeps up a flow of light chatter to the others until he returns, and then, taking the glass and the tube from him, moves into the middle of the room, followed by the three men. He then appears to go into a lengthy description of how the tube is used, taking care that his back is towards the Princess. She, the Incomparable Hypatia, bears it for a moment or two with patience. But, finally, curiosity—which is, sooner or later, the ruin of all women—gets the better of her. She leaves her Throne, goes quietly towards the group,

and, standing at Gosburton's elbow, listens eagerly to his explanation. From the corner of his eye he sees her arrive, and, putting the whistle into the glass, he blows.]

THE PRINCESS (*crying out*). Oh, how delightful! And can anybody do it?

GOSBURTON (*turning*). Well, not anybody. Most clever people.

THE PRINCESS (*as excited as a child*). Could I do it?

GOSBURTON. Of course. Try.

[He hands her the tumbler and another tube. Running to her Throne the Princess seats herself hastily, puts both hands round the tumbler, the tube between her lips, and begins to blow. The song is more beautiful than the most inspired song of the greatest among professional nightingales. The Ministers dig each other in the ribs. Gosburton opens his cigarette case.]

GOSBURTON. It's—it's extremely good, isn't it? Personally I doubt whether any nightingale could do half so well.

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*laughing like a child*). Oh, I

think it's ever so much better than a mere bird. Why, one is one's own nightingale! Think what economy there is in that! Oh, I—I *never* was so delighted with anything. (*She begins to blow again, making the prettiest grimace in the world.*)

GOSBURTON. How beautifully you blow. How quickly you've learnt. How clever you are! (*Inwardly*) And, by George, how doocid charming!

PRINCESS HYPATIA. And may I keep this dear little tube?

GOSBURTON. You may keep them all—I bought a dozen—they made a reduction for a quantity.

PRINCESS HYPATIA. Oh, may I really?

GOSBURTON. On one condition—that you dismiss your Ministers, and appoint me in their place, and create for me another post—that of husband.

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*hanging her head to hide a smile of infinite gladness*). Isn't— isn't it rather sudden?

GOSBURTON (*taking her hand*). It is rather. But, my dear little wilful, petulant, but utterly sweet Princess, think what economy there is in it.

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*with a sly smile and a blush*). I—I confess that side of the question is certainly worth consideration. I will think it over and give you my answer.

GOSBURTON (*putting his arm round her waist*). When?

PRINCESS HYPATIA (*holding up her bewitching face*).
Whenever you choose to take it, sir.

[Why trouble to tell how Gosburton took it? Hasn't
history made every reading man and woman aware
of his manner of procedure?]

THE INVADERS

SCENE—*The model-room at "Cashchinka's," in Old Bond Street. Large and extremely cleverly-designed bills—bills quite in the arts-and-crafty manner—adorn the distempered walls, giving forth the welcome news that the summer sale has now commenced, that Paris models are being literally thrown away, and that lingerie must be cleared out, and is consequently marked at prices much below cost. Lady Adolphus Weepinwiller, and some of the other members of the syndicate running the business, are standing in listless attitudes waiting for the fly to come into the parlour.*

Old Bond Street looks hot, tired and out of temper. There are barely any English people to be seen, but large groups of strange-looking men and women are slowly passing from shop to shop—men wearing queer tight-fitting suits of thin dittoes, straw-coloured brown boots, high-cut waistcoats, and that weird atrocity the straw dump Homburg hat, or whatever it is called; and women dressed in short tailor-made

skirts, fitting like wax ; very high-heeled, khaki-coloured boots, long and narrow of vamp ; rainbow-patterned blouses, indescribable headgear ; hair drawn up from the nape of the neck, fastened with an imitation diamond brooch at the back, for no apparent reason, and brought, by devious routes, to the top of the head, where it culminates in a large muscular knob. The faces of both men and women are tanned, but the former are thin, wiry, alert, cunning, and sometimes humorous ; while the latter are square-jawed, heavy, massive, expressionless and sleepy-looking. The women are all carrying, slung like race-glasses, huge leather pouches. Many of the men carry kodaks. None of them can be seen with walking-sticks.

LADY ADOLPHUS (*suddenly trembling with excitement, as she catches sight of a batch of these people passing the shop*). Look ! look ! The—the—the Invasion has begun.

MRS "DOGGY" FLAIRD (*seizing her hand and stroking it reassuringly*). It's all right, my dear ; it's all right. It is hot to-day, but you'll be quite well again in a minute.

LADY ADOLPHUS (*flinging Mrs Doggy away, and dancing wildly round the callous Paris models*). Well ?

I never was better in my life? Oh, ho! *Now* we shall sell. *Now* the giddy coins will fall into our hands. The Invasion has begun. Dance, ye pessimists, dance!

MRS DOGGY FLAIRD (*quietly, with the air of one who has obtained a St John's Ambulance certificate*). Vicky, without lettin' her see how upset you are at the horribly sudden attack of brain fever poor Dolly has got, just go as quickly as you can into the back shop, get as much of the strongest tape as you can find, and bring it in here. On your way back, tell Lilian, who is asleep in the tryin'-on room, to come down and keep in front of poor Dolly while we creep up behind her and tie her hands behind her back.

LADY VICTORIA PONT (*horrified*). Tie her hands behind— Oh, Doggy, how too fearfully awful!

LADY ADOLPHUS (*in and out among the models like an exhilarated Ogibway*). Hi, hi, tum-ti-tum-ti, hi, hi, tiddy-iddy, tiddy-iddy, tiddy . . .

MRS DOGGY. Can't you *see*? Can't you *hear*? It's brain. You don't think I spent a fortnight's holiday in a South African hospital for nothing, do you? I tell you, she's balmy.

LADY ADOLPHUS (*stopping suddenly, and peering, breathless and eager, out into the street*). The place is alive with them.

MRS DOGGY (*sotto voce to Lady Victoria*). There you are, you see. She thinks she sees 'em again. The first stage.

LADY ADOLPHUS. What queer-looking things! All hips and elbows.

MRS DOGGY. Ssssh! Let her babble. She's quite harmless when she babbles.

LADY ADOLPHUS. Oh, if they would only come in! I believe they're all millionaires, and perhaps we could make a little money after this disastrous season. . . . My goodness, I believe a gang of 'em *is* coming here. Oh, darlings, how too jolly for words! "Doggy," old lady (*she turns and catches Mrs Flaird by both arms*), isn't it ripping?

MRS DOGGY (*shrinking*). Grrrrh! . . . Go away!

LADY ADOLPHUS (*after an astounded pause*). Good Heaven! I do believe you thought I was mad. Oh, ho, ho! I'm only talking about the Americans. Look—look at 'em, swarming down the street!

MRS DOGGY (*too relieved to be ashamed of herself*). The Americans—oh, yes, yes, of course.

LADY ADOLPHUS (*excitedly, as a large group waits on the front step of the shop*). Mind, the prices are to be twice as much as they ever were—two hundred per cent. above cost price. Look out. They're coming Now, *now* we shall do some business, if you like.

[*The door opens. Four stalwart American women enter, followed by four tired, thin, clean-shaven men. The women sit down without a word, and coolly inspect every detail of the dresses worn by Lady Adolphus and the other members of the syndicate, every now and then pinching the cloth or running their open palms over the surface of the material. The four men, finding no chairs, sit in a quiet line along the window-ledge, lighting cigarettes.*]

LADY ADOLPHUS (*blushing and feeling exceedingly uncomfortable*). Er—er— Can I? . . . May we? . . . Er—

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN (*who is minutely examining the hem of Lady Adolphus's frock*). Did you speak, sa-ay?

LADY ADOLPHUS. Oh, not at all, thank you. Pray, don't let me disturb you.

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN. No disturb. Say as much as you like. Goo arn. I sha'n't listen, any way.

LADY ADOLPHUS (*hysterically*). Oh, ho! How deliciously f-f-funny!

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN. Yers? . . . Sa-ay, Jiney, here's another case of what these English call funny. It wants a bit of seein', don't it?

SECOND AMERICAN WOMAN (*who is minutely examining the make of Mrs Doggy's shoes*). That's so, Charity. It do-oo.

LADY ADOLPHUS (*for want of something better to say. The First American Woman has arrived at the foundations of her frock*). As a nation, madam—

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN (*getting up from her knees*). Thanks. But I reckon we already know more about you as a nation than you do yourselves. We've been over for three days. Tell me, what are you, anyway? Do you fancy that you're a dressmaker, or what, sa-ay?

LADY ADOLPHUS (*with natural indignation*). Doesn't the famous name, "Cashchinka," convey anything to you, then?

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN. Nothen', 'cept chuck cent. There's a pe-cu-liar chink to be heard when that University game is played on a macadam yard. Why I asked was because I don't think much of the way you're dressed. Nothen' spick 'bout you, is there—nothen' takin'? Nobody with sight, even in one eye, would take you for an American, would they?

LADY ADOLPHUS. No, thanks—I mean, I'm afraid they wouldn't.

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN. Never mind. We'll just try on all the dresses you've got knockin' around.

LADY ADOLPHUS. Oh, thank you *so* much, madam. This way, please.

SECOND AMERICAN WOMAN. And the things you call lingerie, are they—

LADY ADOLPHUS (*hastily*). They are, madam. Just as usual.

THIRD AMERICAN (*speaking for the first time*). Then I guess we'll try all those on too. May as well do the lot, anyway, now we're here.

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN. Any hats?

LADY ADOLPHUS. A large stock upstairs.

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN. Good. We'll go through those too, then. We've two hours before we need to get along to the Ciss'l. Boys, guess you'll be all right, say?

THE FOUR MEN (*in one quiet breath*). That's so.

[*Two hours pass in the inevitable manner. As cool as cucumbers, the four American Women come back into the shop followed by Lady Adolphus and the other members of the syndicate, tousled, hot, and speechless with indignation.*]

THE FOUR MEN (*rising as one man*). Got through?

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN. That's so—such as it is.

A rottener stock of rags I never saw outside the Chinese quarter of Noo Yark. Guess we're rested now, and better get right along?

LADY ADOLPHUS (*her voice trembling*). But you don't surely mean that, after we have all worked like horses for two full hours for you, after you and your friends have *forced* on everything we have in the whole of these premises, even to our own private things, that you—you aren't going to—to buy a single th-thing?

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN (*coolly*). That's so. Why, anyway?

LADY ADOLPHUS. Well, I'm—I'm blown!

FIRST AMERICAN WOMAN (*opening the shop door*). Good afternoon! . . . And, say, it's a pity you can't arrange your windows over this side—not that you've anything here to arrange. Rags, the lot of 'em, at excelsior prices!

FIRST AMERICAN MAN (*the last to leave the wreck*). Say, give me silver for haff-a-soverign, will you?

LADY ADOLPHUS (*on the point of bursting into tears and naturally highly overwrought*). No, I won't. And what's more, I sincerely wish that Columbus had died of thrush at the age of five. Go away!

FIRST AMERICAN MAN (*lighting his fiftieth cigarette*

and dropping the old one inside the shop). Mighty common lot of people this side, anyway.

*[He passes quietly out, leaving the door open.
Lady Adolphus does not stand upon the order of
her crying, but bellows.]*

THE END—AND A BEGINNING

SCENE—*Minnie Iver's bedroom in her mother Lady Horace Iver's house in John Street, Mayfair. Minnie Iver, who was, as everybody knows, placed in the first three in the race for the Beauty Cup at Ascot, is sitting on the edge of the four-poster bed, looking round, with a smile in which there is very little amusement and a great deal of bitterness, at the vast collection of dress-baskets, packed, labelled, and ready for removal to the fashionable German watering-place of the moment on the morrow. Her bosom friend, Evelyn South, is standing at the window, looking down at the hot, unpleasantly-smelling street, and at the trampled straw spread out for many yards either way, to temper the incessant noise of hoofs to the shorn lamb from South Africa lying in the next house, babbling of peaceful farmers, white flags, and Mauser bullets, in a darkened bedroom.*

INDISCRETIONS

room below, Lady Horace is trying over a new song, and the utterly unsympathetic, metallic and well-worn soprano drifts in through the half-open door.

LADY HORACE (*rising fifty-six, con anima*).

. . . "Unless you can love as the angels may,
With the breath of Heav'n betwixt you,
Unless you can dream that his faith is fast
Through behoving and unbehoving,
Unless you can die when the dream is past,
Oh! nev-er call it lov-ing,
Oh! nev-er call it lov—"

MINNIE (*laughing harshly, throwing back her head*). Ho, ho, ho! Ha, ha!

EVELYN (*turning with quiet astonishment*). My dear!

MINNIE (*choking*). Can't you hear her? Can't you hear what she's singing? Ye gods and little f-f-fishes! Ho, ho, ho!

EVELYN. I know the song well. It's very sweet. Why do you laugh like that?

MINNIE. Laugh? . . . Love, she's singing about love—"Unless you can love as the angels may," can't you hear? Mother yelling about love! Oh, my hat! Oh, ho, ho!

EVELYN (*quite nervous, taking Minnie's hands and*

patting them). Don't, there's a dear. You mustn't, you know. You've got through the season so well; don't have a breakdown now. What *is* the matter?

MINNIE (*suddenly making her mouth hard and angry*). Hoh! matter! I should like you to have heard mother, just before you came in, on the subject of love. "Love as the angels may"—hark at her! And twenty minutes ago she was standing with her back to me, looking in the glass while she antedated her eyebrows, fairly letting rip at me because I hadn't managed to collar one of the men with money during the season. "How much longer do you expect me to keep you?" she said—the dear. "Here we are, writing R.I.P. over your second season, and you're still hanging round my neck like a millstone. Pride, I suppose *you* call it, or modesty, or some such idiotic thing that prevents you from getting a man. It isn't from want of tuition. I've done *my* duty as a mother, thank Heaven. Pride, indeed! Take me. I was barely seventeen when my excellent parents told me to get out of the nest to make room for a couple of extra horses they wanted to keep. I saw your hideous father"—yes, she actually said "hideous," the dear—"found out that he really *was* worth eleven thousand a year, and before he could cry 'Help!' had hustled him to the altar, lock, stock and barrel." (*She pauses with a little pant, with a slight trembling of the under lip*).

LADY HORACE (*cantabile*).

"Unless you can die when the dream is past,

Oh ! nev-er call it lov-ing,

Oh ! nev-er call—"

MINNIE (*gripping a handful of counterpane*). Hoh ! the dear ! . . . "What about Jim Fanleigh?" she said, leering at herself in the glass. "He's got a little handful of the ready, and he's quite a pretty boy. You love him too. I know you do, because you look such a little fool when you see him unexpectedly. Why on earth you don't pull *that* off beats me. You know what you've got to do. I've told you a hundred times. It never fails, and it—" "Mother," I shouted, "if you don't shut up and get out, I'll throw something at you."

EVELYN (*turning pale*). Oh, Min, you didn't say that !

MINNIE. No, I didn't. As a matter of fact, I believe I said "chuck" instead of "throw." It had a strange effect on mother. Her jaw dropped, she stared at me for a minute as though I were a captain in the Salvation Army or a horsefly, shuddered, and took to her heels. I suppose I ought to have felt sorry—she suddenly looked so old and battered and scratchy; but I didn't. I simply shrieked with laughter. The transformation

was so totally unexpected. The effect would have been electrical even on the music-hall stage.

EVELYN (*sitting on the bed, and bringing Minnie's head down upon her shoulder*). Tell me, dear. Is there any truth in what your mother said? Are you in love with Lord Fanleigh?

MINNIE. Hoh! trust mother for knowing what she's talking about. If—if I didn't love Jim, with every atom of love I've got, should I have found it impossible to lay the horrid trap for him that mother says never fails? Jim never cared, and never could care a hang about me in that kind of way, and it would have made me sick to trick such a dear straight chap as he is. I did try once.

EVELYN (*emphatically*). I don't believe you.

MINNIE. I did, I swear I did, one night at Ascot, after dinner. I must have had just a thimbleful too much champagne. I was on the terrace of the house the Higginses had rented. In the moonlight, looking up at me from the lawn, I suddenly saw Jim. I don't know what made me do it; but I remembered a sentence of mother's—one of "the usual dodges," as she said—and, pretending not to see him, I stooped down in the full glare of the light from the drawing-room and deliberately pulled up my stocking.

EVELYN. Oh-h!

MINNIE (*jumping up and stamping about the room with her hands on her temple*). I wished I was dead a second after; and I believe if Jim had laughed or said anything, I should have *hated* him. But Jim is not that sort of man—no, not one atom. Poor old thing—it's really almost funny now—he just turned away and disappeared into the shadow as though he had seen a ghost. Then he whistled, and sang a bit of *Faust* frightfully out of tune, and kicked his heels about until he thought I had finished. Then he came back slowly, and said "Hello, Miss Iver!" as though he hadn't seen me for a fortnight—dear old thing.

EVELYN. But you've known him since you were quite tiny, haven't you?

MINNIE. Lor', yes. I believe I was in love with him before I could speak—long before I cut my teeth, anyway. At one time we were as thick as thieves, and we ratted and played cricket and footer together like brothers. And we wrote long letters to each other. "Dear old chap" he called me, and I called him just "dear Jim," until the day I was presented. He was stationed at Edinburgh, and he came up to town unexpectedly, and I suddenly saw him staring in at the carriage window as we sat waiting in the string in the Mall, with blue noses and elbows, with blocks of ice for feet. I let down the window with a little shout, "Jim, dear old boy," and he

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blushed and said, "How de do, Miss Iver?" in a frightened kind of way. Since then he's been quite different. He can jabber away with the best of 'em to other girls, but with me he hasn't a word to say for himself; he dries up completely.

EVELYN (*with a little growing smile*). Go on!

MINNIE (*dashing at her, and giving her a hug*). You dear! I'm not boring you?

EVELYN. Boring me!

MINNIE. I believe you were born a mother. I don't know anyone so kind as you are. And it *is* so—so comfortable to throw it all off one's chest sometimes. It's as good as a Turkish bath. One feels light and clean and more healthy after it.

EVELYN (*with the smile growing slowly*). Well, and then?

MINNIE. What do you mean? Well, and then what? There is no well, and then anything. That's just how things are. I've sent all the eligible and generally-wretched specimens of men mother has cornered back to their ghastly palaces, and so I am still "To be sold, with every modern convenience; guaranteed sound: highest references given to intending purchasers; no deposit." . . . Ho, ho! And the man who is the most eligible of all, a man I could catch any day because he is so simple, I won't, because I love him, and he doesn't care

a *fico* for me! And mother hates and loathes me because she still has to buy my dresses and get me about, and because I stand in the way of her little jaunts to Monte Carlo. The dear!

EVELYN. And you go away to-morrow?

MINNIE. Yes, a ripping life, ain't it? . . . A nagging mother, an aching heart, a German watering-place! . . . Oh, what wouldn't I give to be as dead as the season is, never to be—

EVELYN. S-s-s-h! Be careful. Someone's at the door. . . . Yes! What is is?

SERVANT. A note for Miss Iver, and Lord Fanleigh is waiting in his cab for an answer.

[*She gives the note and goes. Evelyn's smile goes on growing.*]

MINNIE (*her hand beginning to shake*). What on earth—I—I thought he'd left town after the Eton and Harrow. . . . I—I— (*She opens the note.*) Read it with me. (*They read.*) "Dear old chap (do you mind my calling you that again?), it's no jolly good. You've been most awful rough on me—stand-off and bored and all that—quite naturally, don't think I'm grumbling—ever since I saw you looking a perfect picture that Drawing-room Day. But it's no jolly good. I've got to tell

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you, whether you snub me or not. I don't like you any more. I don't want to call you 'dear old chap' any more. I don't want to rat or play cricket or footer with you again as long as I live; but, my dear, I love you fearfully, and want you to take me on as a husband. Will you? I'm waiting in the cab."

MINNIE (*dropping the letter and covering her flaming cheeks with both her dainty hands*). Oh, Jimmy!

EVELYN (*whose smile has stopped growing*). Of course, you won't go?

MINNIE (*dashing into a hat, thrusting in numerous dangerous pins with swollen heads and flinging her gloves on*). Won't I? You watch.

[*She flies to the door, turns and gathers up her bosom friend in both arms for a fleeting moment, and then, half-laughing, half-crying, hurries wordlessly away.*]

LADY HORACE (*agitato*):—

"Unless you can love as the angels may,
With the breath of Heav'n betwixt you;
Unless you can dream that—"

[*The hall door bangs. Through the open window*

Evelyn South hears a faint "Min!" "Jim!" and then the sound of wheels. Whereupon she returns to the bed, and, with the perversity of woman, cries as though her heart were breaking, from sheer gladness.]

WITHOUT A MORAL

SCENE I.—*The Plashetts' "charmingly-situated bijou residence" in Sloane Street, two days after their return from their honeymoon tour.*

OTHO PLASHETT (*who has been waiting, with a sunburnt smile, in the infinitesimal hall for a solid three-quarters of an hour for his wife, who, it is quite unnecessary to say, is undergoing the slow torture of dressing*). Nearly ready, darling?

MRS OTHO (*very cleverly speaking without swallowing any of the pins she is carrying in her mouth*). Very nearly, dearest. Getting impatient?

OTHO (*with really genuine indignation*). Impatient? . . . Darling, you must think me a detestable villain. Impatient! Why, I don't mind *how* long you keep me waiting, you know that well enough. Keep me all my life, if you like. (*A charitable proceeding most husbands have a penchant for.*)

MRS OTHO. You darling! When ought we to start?

OTHO (*blandly*). Forty minutes ago, by rights. But

it doesn't really matter. We shall get to the church in time to see them sweeping up the rose leaves.

MRS OTHO. Good gracious me! But then nobody'll see my new dress. Oh, Otho! *why* didn't you watch the time? You're generally *so* punctual. I'm really almost inclined to be angry with you.

OTHO (*rising with agitation and shouting upstairs*). My darling child, please, please don't be angry. Mayn't I come up now and see the—the general effect?

MRS OTHO (*excitedly, purring with great robustness*). Oh, do. You'll be able to tell me which of these fourteen hats to wear, and what angle to wear it at, and whether, if I wear (*he enters with an expression of almost shocked admiration*) this one, I shall want this puff of net round my neck. I don't think I'm so fond of net as I used to be, and I think I feel like quite a staggering kind of hat this afternoon. Don't you think if I wore this nasturtium - and - lettuce - leaves one round the wrong way it would give the desired effect?

OTHO (*going back two steps, with his head at the critical angle of forty-five*). Oh, lovely! Oh, played indeed! Bang over the pavilion!

MRS OTHO. I'm glad you like it. I suppose those curious ejaculations mean that you do. But I'm inclined to think it doesn't look natural; there is too much

wilful art in the backwards effect. What do you say to this buttercup-and-daisy-with-the-sun-rising-in-the-mist hat—*quite* French!—without the net?

OTHO (*changing the position of his head and advancing one step*). Quite the best thing in acrostics I've ever seen! I can *hear* the people turning their astounded heads to stare at it.

MRS OTHO (*not quite sure whether to be immensely pleased or amazingly annoyed*). Yes, well—er—let's try this one then. It's very simple, and yet it's full of a hidden meaning which doesn't exist. Ostrich plumes and chiffon *always* have that effect.

OTHO. So I've noticed. Look out for the rum-looking hair cage. It looks as though it were about to slope with that enormous Nubian hair pin.

MRS OTHO (*laughing*). Hair net, Otho, darling. And it's *not* a West African hair pin. It wasn't even manufactured in Germany. It's home-grown (*turning round with the hat on*). Well, how do you like it? (*The clock strikes the hour.*)

OTHO (*gasping for breath*). Oh—I—say! Rippin'. Ab—so—lute—ly rip — pin'! Phew! I see what you mean about the hidden meaning. It's most apparent, and at the same time, one knows it isn't there. Mar—vellous. You *must* wear it.

MRS OTHO (*charmed*). My dear Otho, you really are

a most useful person. Your taste is quite excellent. Very well then, I'll stick to this, or rather (*with the wicked laugh of a person who insists on making an obvious "joke"*)—I'll stick this to me. And now, you horridly unpunctual man, come along. We're already an hour late through your not watching the time, but, as we intended going by 'bus, I think we'll have a cab and only be half an hour late. Shall we? (*They get to the open door, a cab is hailed, and Mrs Otho enters.*)
Otho!

OTHO (*stepping back as though he had been shot*). Good gracious! what's the matter? Got a pain?

MRS OTHO. I find I simply *can't* wear this hat!

OTHO. What?

MRS OTHO. No, I daren't. (*She gets out hastily.*)

OTHO. Daren't? Why?

MRS OTHO. Don't ask me why. Trust me. I daren't, and there's an end of it. It's one of those things no man—at least, no man who really *is* a man—can possibly understand. I must go back and choose another.

[*With a newly-married smile Otho pays off the cab and follows his wife, and by the time she has finally decided which hat to wear she finds that it is time to dress for dinner.*]

SCENE II.—*The same "charmingly-situated bijou residence" in Sloane Street. Three weeks later.*

OTHO (*who has been waiting in the hall three minutes*).
I say!

MRS OTHO (*through the pins*). Oh, what?

OTHO. I don't know whether you know it, but I've already been kicking my heels about for five minutes. Do, for goodness' sake, hurry up!

MRS OTHO. You're the most impatient person it's ever been my misfortune to meet.

OTHO (*trembling with indignation, and making spiteful passes with his stick at a grandfather clock, which strikes the hour in a plaintive, reproachful manner*). Impatient! I should think so. You're enough to reduce even an affable archangel to a condition of mental pulp. If you're not down in a couple of minutes I—I shall break something.

MRS OTHO. Very well. But oblige me by ringing the bell for someone to clear away the pieces. Would you like me to wear the poppy hat, or the one which is supposed to represent Windsor Castle from the playing fields?

OTHO. Don't care a tuppenny hang. Wear 'em both, only come. Wear 'em both, and carry the other twenty-two, then people will see for themselves the ones they think you ought to have worn. Only do

come! (*Bang! His stick goes through the face of the clock*).

MRS OTHO (*through her tears*). You sinner! I—I'm not nearly ready!

OTHO. *What!* And you've been at it for two hours?—Where are you now?

MRS OTHO. In my bedroom, of course.

OTHO. Oh, I know that. I mean at what stage?

MRS OTHO. My dear Otho! If I rush till all the curl is out of my fringe, simply throw on my dress and dash into the first cab I find, I may be ready in three-quarters of an hour, but if I take the proper time, and make myself look thoroughly nice, I may manage to be ready in an hour and a—

[*The front door opens and shuts violently. The "charmingly-situated bijou residence" trembles with a little cry of fright. Mrs Otho runs a safety-pin into her shoulder, and Otho springs into a hansom, giving the direction to the callous driver in prime Kiplingese. As we have said, this is without a moral, but, generally speaking, bachelors will do better to remain bachelors.*]

THE END

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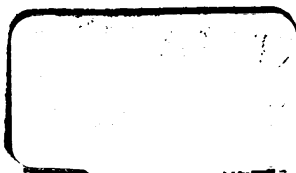
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